

AN: I was inspired to write this based on the possibility of what would have happened if Harry stayed in Diagon Alley before his first year. It seems unlikely, especially when you consider Hagrid's loyalty to Dumbledore. I hope I made it at least seem plausible. Oh, and my apologies, I'm not particularly good at writing dialogue for Hagrid. One last thing: the calendar I am using (making it up in my head) has some odd dates, so when days of the week are mentioned in the canon, they might not be correctly displayed here. Also, I'd like to give credit to lorddwar; many of the spells used came from his fic. Anyway, without further ado, here it is. Oh, and OOC Ollivander. I do not own Harry Potter nor am I profiting from this fanfiction, except my ego.

Inner thoughts, Spells, Parseltongue = Italics Flashbacks =Italics + bold

Prologue: A Crisis Of Faith

-Starts at the end of Hagrid's introduction of Harry to the Wizarding World-

Hagrid was walking Harry back up Diagon Alley, the purchases from the day's shopping excursion weighing them down, when it happened. Hagrid was overjoyed at completing Dumbledore's assignment, getting the boy-who-lived his letter and bringing him shopping for school supplies, with barely any difficulty. All he had to do now was lead Harry back through the Leaky Cauldron to a train station, give him his ticket to the Hogwarts Express, and put him on a train back to his relatives in Surrey. His relatives.

"We Swore we'd stamp it out of him! Wizard indeed," an angry Vernon Dursley had shouted at him. (pg. 53 HP and the SS)

Hagrid froze as the memory hit him. Behind him Harry noticed his likeable companion's difficulties. "Hagrid, are you all right?"

Hagrid looked back at the small boy with him, suddenly taking in how skinny and frail he really looked. "Yeh, fine 'Arry exempt 'm tired. Put yur' stuff down and take a breath'r."

They carefully put down Harry's new school things while Hagrid's head was swimming with thoughts. It's not like, they couldn't possibly, hurt him, could they? Even if they detested magic they

wouldn't dare hurt him, or try to take away his stuff. And anyway, good old Arabella Figg is keeping watch over him, there was no way she'd let that happen to him. He was about to beckon Harry forward again when another memory sprang to the forefront of his mind concerning his recent encounter with the Dursleys.

"I was the only one who saw her for what she was- a Freak!" Petunia had shouted. (pg. 53 HP and the SS)

That memory only served to reignite his sense of distress. How could anyone hate Lily? How could her own sister hate Lily? But she did. She thought Lily was a freak. And Hagrid remembered his own childhood, when other kids thought he was a freak. And how they insulted and hated him. Because he was bigger than them, had giant's blood in him, and he was fascinated by interesting magical creatures. And by all indications Petunia acted the same way. Hagrid was sure for a limited amount of time the Dursleys would keep away from bothering Harry. But afterwards? What happened when they realized he wasn't a constant threat? And any notions of him sending his owl off with a letter seemed ridiculous. They could kill the owl, or really hurt him, and he'd never get a letter in time if they decided to do something malicious.

But they wouldn't hurt him, right? On the other hand, Petunia Dursley hated magic and feared it, the same way kids hated and feared him because they didn't know him and he looked scary. And Harry was already dressed in hand-me-downs that were too big for him. And he was far too skinny. Would it really be that much of a stretch for the Dursleys to go from mistreating him to hurting him? And they didn't have to hurt him, really. They could just refuse to get him to Kings Cross; stop him from going to Hogwarts if they so hated magic. Could he really do that to the boy who'd defeated Voldemort? Right there, Hagrid almost asked Harry about his time at the Dursleys. But he realized however Harry was treated there would embarrass him, and they were both liable to lose control.

Dumbledore said this would be so simple. Go to his relatives, give him his letter, take him to Diagon Alley, and get him back home for dinner. But if he learned of Harry's circumstances, how far his relatives were willing to go to prevent him from learning magic, of the potential danger he might be in, this wouldn't be simple.

"There is always a choice between doing what is right and what is easy, Hagrid" Dumbledore had once said to him.

Hagrid tried to calm himself. What do I do?

"Facts Hagrid, Facts. Theories are nice, but what are the facts?" Dumbledore again was saying after a report on some mysterious goings-on in the Forbidden Forest.

Alright, I need facts. And another memory hit him.

"Do you mean ter tell me that this boy- this boy!- don't know nothin' abou'- about ANYTHING!" he had shouted at the Dursley's just last night. (pg. 49 HP and the SS)

Even if he knew nothing about his treatment by the Dursley's, there was a solid fact to go on. Harry knew nothing of the wizarding world. Of course, Hagrid could just say he'd learn his way 'round the wizarding world in time. But what if he learned it from those dark families, like the Malfoys?

He watched through the window of Madam Malkin's as Harry conversed with a blond boy who could only be a Malfoy.

Hagrid involuntarily shivered. What if Lucius had come along and hijacked the boy-who-lived from him; filled his head with ridiculous ideas and prejudice. Harry wouldn't know better. And he shuddered to think about Lily and James watching their son turn dark from the afterlife.

It wasn't like he'd acted any better. He'd he made a mistake in Flourish and Blotts; he should've let Harry buy every book he wanted. But he kept him to books strictly on the school list, so Harry had no way of getting any more information about the wizarding world until he went to Hogwarts. No. Not Good. By then it might be too late. A bright, curious, boy who was also famous and just introduced to the magical world would seek information. And the information could come from many sources, like his peers, which was another opportunity for Malfoy to-; nothing good could come of that. And now, he was supposed to take Harry back to the Dursleys. The worst thing he could do in this situation was send Harry back to the Dursleys. But then what else could he do?

Well, whatever he was going to do, he'd explain to professor Dumbledore once he got back from the ICW conference at the end of August. But for now it was on him. What could he do for Harry? And then it hit him.

"The Usual, Hagrid," said Tom the barkeep as he reached for a glass.

Tom. Good old Tom Daniels. The friendly chap who was the barman at the Leaky Cauldron. If he took Harry there he could let Tom watch over him. He could even tell Tom about Harry's just coming to the wizarding world. Tom could tell Harry everything. He was always great with advice. And Tom had an impartial knowledge of everything in the wizarding world. Plus, that would mean Harry could stay in the alley, and get books and things at his leisure. And Tom could keep an eye on him. Maybe even give him so tips about magic. Better yet, Harry could meet wizards and witches his own age in the alley. It was perfect.

His course of action decided, Hagrid beckoned Harry to follow him. It took them five minutes to get to the Leaky Cauldron, and by then it was getting quite full, being the dinner hour and all. Hagrid set Harry up at a table to get a meal while he went to talk to Tom. He eventually found him heading towards his supply room to get more drinks. He tapped on the shoulder. "Tom, can I talk to ya' for a minute."

"Sure Rubeus, always a pleasure," Tom answered while flashing a toothy grin. Once they were inside the supply room, Tom conjured two chairs. "What's on your mind, Hagrid?"

"Well, as ya remember earlier, I'm introducing Harry Potter to the wizarding world. We just got done with shopping for his Hogwarts things." Hagrid lowered his voice. "You won't repeat what I'm about to tell you." Tom nodded earnestly before applying silencing charms to the door. That was Hagrid's cue to continue talking. So he recounted tracking down the Dursleys, and finding Harry, and then taking him to Diagon Alley. Hagrid made sure to voice his suspicions about the Dursleys' behavior towards Harry and his ignorance of the wizarding world and its customs. Finally he finished. "Well, what do I do?"

Tom sighed, clearly straining to think, and put his head in his hands. After a few minutes of silence he lifted his head up. "If for no other reason than he has no knowledge of the wizarding world, leave him here. I'll find out the full story of his relatives treatment if I can. In the meantime, I'll let him study magic here, and introduce him to the world he belongs to. When September the first rolls around, I'll floo him over to the Hogwarts Express after you leave him his ticket. I'll keep an eye on him, but I'll let him wander the alley as he pleases, and fill him in on everything he needs. I know what it's like to be in that position, an outsider to an entirely new world. And I have a civic duty to aid our savior in any way I can. Alright?" Hagrid agreed and Tom made to grab the drinks he came for as he and Hagrid departed the room.

Hagrid went back to Harry's table just as he was finishing his meal. Over dessert, Hagrid decided to tell Harry his plan.

"Alright Harry, I've got a room set up for you here. Since you don't know nuthin' 'bout the wizarin' world, Tom will tell ya everything ya need to know." Harry absorbed this in a shocked silence. NO DURSELYS FOR THE REST OF THE SUMMER! It was hard to contain his glee. After a delicious desert, Tom came by to give Harry his room key. He and Hagrid lugged everything up to his room.

"Now Harry, a few things ya should know before I go. Keep yer wand with you at all times. It's Diagon Alley, so the ministry can't track magic. That said, only use it in an emergency or when yer sure no ones watchin'. Maybe learn a few protective spells as well. O, yeh might wanna pick up a trunk, that stuff's heavy an' bulky an' 'ard to lung 'round. Yeh should consult Tom for any questions yeh have 'bout the wizarding world. Oh, and 'eres yur ticket for September to get ya ta Hogwarts. Take care 'Arry. Yer a good kid." And with that, Hagrid dissapparated back to Hogsmead.

Harry looked out over Diagon Alley. He was free. Free! He could never have imagined spending nearly a year away from the Dursleys. Yesterday, he was in a rundown hut, on the run from who knows what. Today, he was a wizard; a wizard, in a completely new world, with completely new opportunities, and with no Dudley to ruin it all. He was almost tempted to run back into the Alley, but one look at his disorganized mass of newly purchased school things, with money he never imagined he had, changed his mind. After attempting to organize his stuff, Harry fell asleep, exhausted, and

fully clothed. His final thought was that this was officially the best birthday ever.

Chapter One: The Advisor

Harry woke up the next morning refreshed and filled to the brim with happiness. After a quick shower, he put back on yesterdays clothes and headed down to the main dining room. Once there he took a table and had breakfast. After breakfast Tom came over. He beckoned Harry towards the backroom while telling one of his employees to run the bar in his absence. Once inside, Tom cast a few privacy charms. Finally, he turned to Harry.

"Why are you wearing the same clothes you did yesterday, Harry? And why are they so worn and ill-fitting?" Tom asked.

Harry blushed and looked down. He didn't say anything.

"Harry?"

"They're my cousin's hand-me-downs," he finally muttered. Tom heard what he said though.

"Why are you wearing your cousin's old clothes?" Tom asked again.

"They said a freak like me didn't deserve proper clothes." He whispered finally after some more hesitation.

Tom and Harry sat in silence for a long while after that declaration. Tom had to resist his first instinct to go and curse the Dursleys into slugs for their crimes against the Boy-Who-Lived. However, after a few minutes of calming down, he decided that would be extremely counterproductive. He knew that Harry was here now, and he had an obligation: to Hagrid, to Harry, and to himself. But what could he do for the boy-who-lived? Well, first he needed more information.

"I'm sorry to ask this, Harry, but could you tell me about your time at the Dursleys?" Tom queried gently. He really was sorry, both for putting the boy in this uncomfortable position, and for hearing it. If Harry's time in the muggle world was as Tom suspected, then he'd have to resist the urge to curse unruly customers today.

Harry was extremely uncomfortable to be asked about his time at the Dursleys. He hated it there, and he never wanted anyone in the wizarding world, where he was considered a hero, or something like that, to ever know. But Tom sealed the deal.

"Harry." Harry looked at Tom. Tom had his wand out. "I swear on my life and magic that I won't tell any secrets Harry James Potter shares with me about his time with the Dursleys, unless I have express consent to tell from the aforementioned. So mote it be." There was a flash of bright blue light as Tom's oath took effect. "Now, anything you tell me I can never repeat unless you say otherwise."

This was Harry's cue to start talking. About the cupboard under the stairs he was in for ten years. About having next to no food. About his cousin and his gang picking fights with him and beating him up, whether at "home" or abroad. About working like a dog for his relatives. About being forced to get worse grades than Dudley. Every grievance, every ounce of unfairness and abuse the Dursleys brought on Harry he revealed to Tom. When he finally finished, Harry and Tom sat in an awkward silence.

It took every ounce of Tom's self control to not go firing unforgivables at Harry's relatives. The only thing that stopped him was his experience as a barman. He was used to hearing tales of woe from his patrons, and sitting listening patiently through it, no matter how depressing their stories might be. That sold more drinks and earned him a lot of repeat customers. Calming himself, Tom realized that he might not be the smartest bloke around, but he was good enough to properly introduce Harry to the wizarding world. He already had a plan of action.

"All right Harry. I understand. And I'm sorry. Sorry that no one checked up on you these ten years. Sorry for how your life has been. I can never right the wrongs those people did to you," he said as a tear welled up in his eye. "But the important thing is that you have a future ahead of you; a whole world you've barely even dreamed about. Those bastards can't hurt you now. They have no jurisdiction in our world. In fact we could go today and try and apply for emancipation, at the ministry or gringotts." Harry's eyes lit up in excitement at this. "We won't though." Harry's face fell. "We're going to go to St. Mungo's, that's the wizard hospital, and get you checked out. Ten years of starvation can't have been good for your body. We will have to tell them about your time with the muggles, but I think they can keep it a secret from the public. And then we're going to go clothes shopping, muggle clothes shopping. I know enough about the muggle world from families that come in to know where to go."

Maybe tomorrow we'll see about that emancipation. Sound like a plan Harry?"

He nodded hesitantly at the thought of seeing doctors. Tom dispelled the privacy charms and had Harry wait while he went to tell his assistant to run the place in his absence. After ten minutes he returned and Harry accompanied him to the fireplace. Tom drew his wand and lit a fire with a quick incendio before turning to Harry.

"Most wizards who can't or don't like to apparate travel from place to place using the Floo Network. It is a network that can be accessed from any registered magical fireplace. All you need is a hooked-up fireplace and floo powder." Tom offered the bag in his hand to Harry. "Take a pinch of it and throw it into the fire, Harry. Then say your destination, "St. Mungo's Hospital," and when the flames turn green go through them."

Harry took the powder, threw it into the fire, yelled "ST. MUNGO'S HOSPITAL!" and dived through. He landed in an undignified heap on a white tile floor. The fire roared to life beside him and Tom stepped out. He leaned over to help Harry up.

"We'll get the healers to look at that too, Harry. Oh, and you don't need to shout when using the floo network" Once standing, Harry followed Tom to a counter. As he walked, he finally noticed how busy the lobby was. He finally got to the chart telling where to head for various magical maladies. Tom flashed the on-duty witch a toothy grin as he asked, "Where would I go if I wanted a checkup for a young wizard?"

The witch smiled back gently, "We'll call a healer to give him a checkup." Five minutes later a young healer walked right next to Tom.

"Who am I examining, Gladys?" he asked the on duty attendant. She gestured at Tom and Harry. He looked at them both appraisingly, but didn't notice Harry's scar. "If you'll follow me, please."

They followed the healer down a long corridor until he finally led them into a room outfitted with some healing potions and examination devices. He closed the door and applied privacy

charms before turning to Tom and Harry. "Take a seat." He gestured to the chairs against the wall. "What can I do today, Mr.-?"

"Daniels. Tom Daniels. We do have healer-patient confidentiality?"

The healer looked insulted. "St. Mungo's keeps all matters between healers and patients," he responded biting.

"Good. This is Harry Potter." The healer's eyes rose dramatically as he finally noticed Harry's scar. "And he's just finished telling me the most interesting tale about his time in the muggle world..." Harry's reluctant nod was good enough for the vow to allow Tom to continue.

Tom went on to explain the lowlights of the Dursleys treatment of him, and why he now needed a healer visit. The doctor conjured a chair to listen to Tom's story, then nodded in the right places and listened intently. Once Tom finished, he turned to Harry.

"Well, Mr. Potter. We have quite a day for you. First I'm going to treat your injuries. Then I'll prescribe you some potions for malnutrition. It should repair the damage fully in about six months. After that, I'll do some wizarding disease immunities so you don't get anything like Dragon Pox. Then I'll see what we can do for your eyesight. And finally, I'll test your magical power to make sure everything's in order. And to make sure you're not bothered, I'll cast a notice-me-not charm on you, so that only people you reveal your identity to or who can see through that charm, of which there are almost none, will know who you are. In fact, I'll just reapply it for you whenever you need it. Alright?"

Harry nodded eagerly even while inwardly grimacing. He hated doctors. He always had hated them because his worst punishments came right after the Dursleys had to take him to the doctors.

"We don't have money to spend on a freak like you." His Uncle had once shouted.

But the various examinations went smoothly. The damage from skirmishes with Dudley and his gang was easy to repair. A little harder to deal with was the malnutrition and starvation, but the healer proscribed several potions that should have him taller and bigger by Christmas. The healer than gave him some potions that would give him immunity to the troublesome children's diseases like

Dragon Pox and Scrofungulus. He also gave him something that would aid his balance after traveling via the Floo Network or a portkey. After examining his glasses the healer found a potion that would correct his eyesight over the course of the month. He would have to wear the glasses for a while, but by the end of the month his eyesight would be perfect and he could discard them. And finally, the healer wanted to examine his magic.

"I'm pretty sure, Mr. Potter, that you have no idea how to tell magical strength. Hell, I'm pretty sure you don't even know what magic truly is." Harry nodded. "May I, Mr. Daniels?" Tom nodded. "Magic is this force that exists all around us, that we have access to and an ability to control. We can manipulate it to suit our intentions. There are many components to casting a strong spell. And many theories about magic and how it truly works. I leave it to your Ravenclaw tendencies to find more information. Magical strength, however, is determined by the ability of the caster to do things. First, Mr. Potter, tell me about your accidental magic experiences as a child."

So Harry told him about every one of his accidental magic experiences, starting with having his head shaved and regrown in one night, and then when he shrank a revolting sweater his aunt had tried to make him wear, and turning a teacher's hair blue in a fit of nervousness, and then when he escaped from his cousin and his gang by appearing on the school roof, and finally with the most recent zoo trip, vanishing the glass and speaking to the snake. Tom and the healer were both shocked at his experiences.

The healer leaned back in his chair. "Those are interesting experiences with magic, Mr. Potter. Yes, very interesting." He looked at Harry. "You see, normal accidental magic is turning people or objects different colors, levitating things, summoning them to you, and perhaps a small transfiguration or cushioning charm. You, however, displayed a hair growth charm, or perhaps some metamorphmagus abilities," Harry looked confused at that so Tom jumped in.

"Metamorphmagi have the ability to change parts of their body at will, Harry."

The healer didn't look pleased at being interrupted, but continued anyway. "You also performed a shrinking charm, vanished an object, and most impressively, apparated."

Having heard that term twice today, Harry's curiosity made him ask, "What is apparating?"

The healer chuckled. "Apparating, or apparition, is a form of magical transportation that involves willing yourself from location to location. Many adult wizards can't do it without being splinched, or leaving parts of themselves behind. You need a license to legally do it." Harry was slightly green after hearing that wizards could leave parts of themselves behind while performing apparition. Tom took this opportunity to jump in.

"What about his speaking to a snake, healer?" he asked.

The healer looked thoughtful. "There has never been an age requirement for the gift of parseltongue to manifest. Do you mind if we do a test? I will conjure a snake and see if he can communicate with it." Tom nodded. The doctor raised his wand. "Serpentsortia", he chanted, and a long, brown snake appeared at the end of his wand.

Harry looked at it. "Can you understand me?" The serpent looked at him

"Yes I can. What is your bidding?" The snake replied.

The doctor waved his wand and vanished the snake. He looked at Harry curiously. "You are a parseltongue, Mr. Potter. You should keep quiet about that gift."

"Why?" Harry asked curiously.

Tom answered this. "Parseltongue is seen as a mark of a dark wizard in our world, Harry. It's probably because history remembers two famous dark wizards as parseltongues, Salazar Slytherin and You-Know-Who. There are also rumored dark rituals which only parseltongues can perform."

The doctor waved this off. "However, it is also rumored that parseltongues can utilize a form of magic through speaking it that is excellent for warding, healing, and concealment. So don't take such a dim view of your gift. It is just that; a gift. Keep it hidden though, for your own safety."

"What is Warding?" Harry queried.

"Warding is the term used for putting protective magic over a place, such as preventing people from apparating into or out of the place, or people from entering a place. Most magical homes have basic wards protecting their house," the healer answered. He cleared his throat. "We've gotten off topic. Those were impressive feats of accidental magic, Mr. Potter. But now we're going to test your current magical strength." He thought for a moment. "One of the theories of determining magical strength, the one that I think has the most validity, is the magical core theory, where every wizard has a core of magic vested inside their bodies. There are some problems with the theory, but it should tell us what we need to know. Please drink this potion." He indicated the bottle in his hand which Harry quickly gulped down. Medical potions always had a nasty burning taste. "Now we have to wait for five minutes. Please count with me." After five minutes had passed the healer touched his wand to the top of Harry's head. He muttered some words Harry couldn't catch.

"These are basic magical diagnostic charms, Mr. Potter," the healer said catching his inquisitive stare. "These charms, in combination with the potion you drank, should reveal the condition your magic is in." Harry waited a few more minutes while the healer was waving his wand and muttering under his breath. He finally finished and turned to Harry.

"Well mister Potter, your magic seems extremely strong. However, I am worried the condition your magic is in. It seems to be acting very erratically." He handed his wand to Harry and vacated his chair. "I know I'm asking a lot but try and levitate the chair. The incantation is wingardium leviosa."

Harry took the wand, noting a weaker connection than with his own wand, and pointed it at the chair. "Wingardium Leviosa," he chanted. The chair rocketed upwards and crashed into the ceiling before falling back to the floor with a thud.

The healer took back his wand and repaired the chair. "Your pronunciation was correct, Mr. Potter. However, I believe that you have spent so long containing your magical powers to better hide from your relatives that your ability to control them is questionable. If you were in, say, your first transfiguration class and you were asked

to change a match into a needle, no matter how much you studied out of your transfiguration books, you couldn't achieve the transfiguration. This is because, while you have ample power, your control of your magic from trying to repress it for so long makes it so that you would either have no effect on the match or perform a negative effect on it, such as lighting it on fire."

Tom looked worried. "Is there a solution, healer?"

"Yes, you need to cast spells and magic to obtain control. I will give you a series of instructions and exercises, Mr. Daniels, and his magic should be under control by the end of the month if you follow it rigorously." He turned to Harry. "I also advise Mr. Potter to obtain emancipation, or at least seek an exemption from the Decree against Under-Age magic so that you can use magic in public or private, and get it under control faster. The more you use your magic, the more control you will obtain and the stronger it will get."

He cleared his throat once more. "Now, everything seems to be in order, so here is the bill for the healer visit and I hope you and Mr. Potter have a nice day."

He handed the bill to Tom, as well as a bag containing the potions Harry needed to take. Harry used the gold he had on hand to pay for the healer visit. He would probably need a visit to Gringotts soon. They left St. Mungo's in silence. They flooed back to the Leaky Cauldron so they could leave the potions behind, and the Harry followed Tom out into the muggle side of the Leaky Cauldron after he finished changing clothes. He and Tom journeyed through muggle London until Tom stopped.

"This is, from what I've heard from muggle families, the best place for regular clothes shopping." Tom led Harry into the store. It was a department store, and Tom found a salesman to help them with their shopping. Harry had never had his own clothing before. So he needed everything. And they got it. Shirts, shorts, pants, underwear, coats, socks, scarves, shoes and such contributed to a very pricey trip. Luckily, Tom kept a quantity of muggle money on hand for any forays into the muggle world. They finally finished their long day and headed back to the Leaky Cauldron a little before six.

Once they were back, Tom checked in with his assistant to make sure everything was running smoothly, while Harry went upstairs to

sort out his new clothes. After changing and showering, Harry went back downstairs for dinner. As he was finishing dinner Tom came over to him.

"Tomorrow we'll take a trip to Gringotts Harry, to get you some more money and see about emancipation. I also suggest you start studying from your new books, particularly your history of magic textbook. It might be good for you to get a little background. Alright?" Harry nodded.

Harry went back to his room and took out the recommended textbook to study from. A time later, he changed and went to bed. He was preparing for another busy day.

Another typical morning in the Cauldron went by as Harry showered, dressed, and had breakfast. Once he was finished Tom turned operating the cauldron over to his assistant. He and Harry set out for Gringotts. Fifteen minutes later, they were in Gringotts lobby. Tom went up to the nearest free Gringotts counter. Gringotts was a madhouse today, with several angry wizards and goblins screaming at each other in the lobby.

The goblin on duty raised a gnarled eyebrow at them. Tom cleared his throat. "We wish to see the manager of the Potter Account." The Goblin stared at him

"Do you have verification?" He asked.

Tom's eyebrows rose. "What sort of verification would satisfy you?"

The goblin snarled. "If you are unaware, there was an attempted break-in two days ago. Nothing short of a blood test would satisfy us!"

Harry decided to intervene. "What exactly is a blood test?"

The goblin turned towards Harry. "A blood test is used for our most Ancient and Secure Accounts. It detects that your blood is infused with magic related to the Potter family. It also gives a full readout of any families you might stand to inherit from."

Harry was curious. "If there is a chance to make money and gain something, why doesn't everyone do it?"

The goblin smirked back at him, truly a disturbing site. "Because, Mr. Potter, you might not have noticed, but wizards are very prideful. They are proud of having no "vermin" in their lineage. So a test that reveals you family tree and possibly gets you some gold or a title is not worth the possibility that muggles, squibs, or muggleborns might be found in your family tree. Some purebloods have conducted this test before, and gained, and some have performed this test before, and suffered a massive loss of prestige. This test is gambling at its finest."

Harry shrugged. "And if this test reveals some accounts that I can inherit?"

"You will assume control when you turn seventeen, or if you're emancipated," the goblin answered.

"Fine let's do the blood test." The goblin beckoned another employee over. He turned to Tom. "Unfortunately sir, blood tests are to be taken privately. If you will follow me, I'll bring you to a waiting room." Harry followed the newly arrived goblin while the one at counter showed Tom into a waiting area.

They soon arrived in a sparsely furnished room with gleaming white walls. The only thing in the room was a table upon which were laid several complex looking contraptions and a few glass vials, and two leather chairs in between a chessboard.

The goblin turned to Harry. "I am Gladrock, Mr. Potter. I will be the one performing the blood test today." He took a glass vial and a knife and turned to Harry. "I need to make a cut on your arm, Mr. Potter." Harry raised his right arm so the goblin would have an easy time. Gladrock took the blade and carefully pressed it to Harry's arm creating a cut. The blood that emerged he caught in the vial. When he had enough he rubbed an herb against the cut to seal it and handed Harry a potion. "This is a blood replenisher, Mr. Potter." Harry drank down the entire contents of the bottle while noting the bitter taste. Gladrock handed the vial of blood to a goblin Harry hadn't noticed before who swiftly left the room. Gladrock beckoned to the chessboard. "A game of chess while we wait, Mr. Potter?" He and Harry sat down on either side and the game began.

Harry still remembered a little of how to play chess. "Call me Harry," he said while waiting for the goblin to make the first move; Harry had black. A flash of surprise flickered across Gladrock's face that the goblin had to quickly mask. A few moves in, Harry asked a question that had been on his mind for a while.

"Gladrock, What services does Gringotts bank offer?"

Gladrock looked startled that someone could ask that question. "We offer banking and protection service, where you can store gold and valuables in our vaults. There is Investment management, where we can invest our clients money in various stocks and businesses, sometimes autonomously and sometimes with only client input. Also we offer the family lineage retrieval service that has so fallen out of favor these days. This bank offers withdrawal service at any other Gringotts location, where we can withdraw contents of your vault for you from that location, for a nominal fee. We have service recommendation, where we can provide names and facilitate communication with a service provider a client desires. And finally, we have private contract services, where you can contract with the goblin nation for a service you need done, like goblin bodyguards." He finished his dull monologue and continued to look at Harry in surprise. "I thought you knew that, Harry?"

Harry shrugged. "I just reentered the wizarding world today. I don't even know how much gold is in my vault."

"Your trust vault, you mean?" the goblin asked.

"I don't really know what the difference is," Harry replied.

"The difference is that your trust vault is to provide for your education and expenses while the Potter Family Vault contains treasures and gold built up by every member of the Potter Family," Gladrock answered.

The surprise was evident on Harry's face. "There's a Potter family vault?" he asked, his voice cracking.

"Yes. You are given control over when you are seventeen or emancipated it and when you have assumed control of the Lordship." The goblin answered, annoyed that this client knew nothing of his own family.

"Lordship?" Harry croaked.

"You really do know nothing of our world." The goblin remarked, though there was no bitterness attached. "The Potter family is an ancient family that was granted Lordship. Why it was granted or what it entails I don't really know. I try to keep out of wizard affairs. Getting back on topic, I will have a statement made up for you by the time the blood test is complete." He said as he summoned a goblin guard and gave instructions before turning his attention back to the chess game.

"How long does it take to do a complete blood test?" Harry asked as Gladrock made a move.

"Typically an hour. Your family has a longer lineage, so I would say two hours or so." The goblin said.

A few moves later and they finished the game, the goblin checkmating Harry. Gladrock reset the board and switched sides.

As Harry made a move, he asked, "The goblin at the desk seemed to be very suspicious of me actually being Harry Potter, yet you seem to have no problem believing me."

The goblin grinned, a toothy, malicious grin. "The one at the desk, Ripnok, is very good at scaring people. You see, if you aren't who you claim to be, we kill you. But the fact that you had no problem walking in claiming to be Harry Potter means you either didn't know that, which from the look of surprise on your face, you didn't, or that you really are Harry Potter. In this case, both are true."

"Really, so if I hadn't been me, I would have been killed?" Harry asked curiously.

"Yes, we have the right to do that from the Goblin-Ministry Treaty of 1536. Any human falsely trying to enter an account they are not entitled to access is under goblin jurisdiction and can be killed without penalty." Gladrock laughed. "Why do you think so many wizards are wary of Gringotts? We will kill to protect what is ours and our clients, and we can do so legally."

"But what happens if something in your possession is stolen?" Harry asked.

"We try to track down and kill the thief. There is even a bounty placed on the thieves' head." The goblin lowered his voice conspiratorially. "That robbery two days ago, we didn't catch the thief."

Harry shook his head. "I think I phrased the question wrong. No, I meant what happens if something put into Gringotts protection was stolen from someone else before it was put here?"

"Well if proof can be supplied that a stolen good is in our possession, then we will turn it over to the family it was stolen from. If the family is deceased, we turn it over to the person who brought the matter to our attention." Gladrock replied. "Going to make a move today, Harry?" he added snidely.

It was a few games of chess later, all of which Harry lost, before a goblin entered the room carrying a stack of papers. He beckoned to Gladrock and they both left the room. Harry waited patiently for them to return. Finally, Gladrock and the other goblin came back into the room.

"Mr. Potter," the goblin began, "There is a reason why these tests use to be popular. The benefits are sometimes extremely great. As they are in your case." He pointed at the top parchment which Harry took curiously. Harry studied it for a few seconds, taking in just how old the Potter family was. They had only really changed their names to Potter in the 12th century. But there were a few more relations listed, all the way back to Ignotus Peverell born right at the end of the Roman Empire. 1600 years was how far his family went back. He looked at Gladrock. "Because of your lack of experience with the wizarding world, you are probably unaware how many people of legendary status are in your family tree." He handed Harry another piece of parchment. "This is the total estimated wealth of your family." Harry took the paper in his hands to read.

THE NOBLE AND MOST ANCIENT HOUSE OF POTTER

"fortes fortuna adiuvat"

Vault wealth:

Potter trust vault: 10,000 galleons, 2,500 sickles, 2,500 Knuts

Potter family vault: 2,500,000 galleons, 250,000 sickles, 250,000 Knuts

In addition, there are assorted books and family treasures whose value is immeasurable

Harry stared at the parchment. He was rich! He looked back at the goblin.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Potter, it was a clause of your parents will that all business holdings along with the family vault only be put under your control after you turn seventeen or are emancipated. A similar clause is also attached to the Lordship of the Potter family." He sensed Harry's next question. He gestured to the forms under the family tree. "These are papers you need to sign to complete part of the emancipation process. They state that you wish to assume control over the Potter Vault and Lordship and understand the responsibilities you inherit with the position." He handed Harry a quill. "This is a blood quill which uses your blood to bind the contract to you." Harry began reading over the various forms. After he read through them he signed his name, in blood the quill took from his hand. "Now you need to get this paperwork signed off at the Ministry of Magic. The second thing can wait until the paperwork is all signed and sealed. Is that acceptable?"

Harry nodded. "Can I use your floo to get there?"

The goblin led him through the corridors to a room with a fireplace in it. He threw Floo powder into it and yelled "Ministry of Magic Department of Inheritance." The flames turned green and Harry walked through the floo. He landed in the mostly empty ministry department. There was only he and the lady at the counter, a bespectacled old woman with gray hair who was shuffling through paperwork, in the room.

Harry went up to the woman at the counter. "Excuse me, madam." She looked up from the paperwork and stared at him with piercing black eyes. "I have this paperwork that Gringotts has signed off on for my emancipation. Because I am the last of an old family, I can be granted emancipation at age eleven, pending Gringotts and

ministerial approval." He handed her the paperwork. The old woman disappeared into the backroom. Half-an-hour later she came back to Harry.

"Everything is in order Mr. Potter, except for one thing. There was a recent addendum made to the law. The minister of magic must sign off on all emancipations. I will direct you to the minister's office, I've already told him you're coming, and after you get his approval, everything can be completed." Harry nodded back at her. She had a boring, bureaucratic monotone and Harry was amazed he hadn't fallen asleep.

Harry followed her around the ministry as she led him to the Minister's office. They scrambled into the elevator, the workers inside not taking notice of Harry, and soon were on the correct floor. Harry followed the lady until they were in a dusty old office. A young blonde-haired woman was sorting through papers, a plaque on her desk reading that she was the Secretary to the Minister. She looked up to see Harry and the older woman.

"I have an appointment with the Minister." Harry said.

"Name, please?" she asked in a dull monotone. It was apparent to Harry that she didn't really care one way or the other.

"Harry Potter." That woke the secretary up. She stared at Harry until she found his scar. She got up excitedly and walked into the Minister's office.

"Your next appointment is here." She told him, the excitement palpable.

"Send him in," a pompous voice replied.

The secretary beckoned Harry inside and the left the room. Once the minister saw who it was, he was up and shaking hand with his brightest smile plastered firmly on his face.

"Harry Potter, it is a pleasure to meet you. I am the Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. I must say, welcome back to our world. How can I help you today?"

"Well Minister, and I must say it is a pleasure to meet you," Harry noticed Fudge's smile getting brighter with this statement and Harry decided to go with his instincts, "I am here because of the sad business with my parents. You see, I am the last of the Potters and there are no living Potter relatives. Of course we do have cousins and so on by marriage, but there is only one Potter remaining in the world; me. And so I am here today to ask for your approval so that I might be granted emancipation. I have everything the process requires, except your approval. That's why I'm here."

"Harry, Harry, Harry, of course I'd be glad to sign off on your emancipation. It's the least I can do for the savior of our world." He took a pen and theatrically signed his name with a flourish. "Now if there's anything I can do for the Boy-Who-Lived, don't hesitate to ask."

It was an uneventful journey back to Gringotts, but within a half-hour, Harry found himself in the same white room with Gladrock and the other unknown goblin. He handed the goblins the paperwork for his emancipation and waited patiently. Gladrock left to process the paperwork and returned fifteen minutes later. He turned to Harry.

"There is one last matter we have to take care of Mr. Potter, or should I say, Lord Potter. In your parents will, they stipulated that if you were emancipated before your seventeenth birthday, you had to have an adult advisor, legally employed by the Potter family, to help you on your way through our world. He must come to Gringotts and swear a few oaths to satisfy this requirement, as well as draw a salary from the vault. You are emancipated, and can now legally use your wand, but you can't visit the family vault, inherit any of the other titles you are eligible for, or wear the family ring until you have an advisor." Gladrock finished apologetically.

Harry shrugged. "Alright, that's no problem. That's actually a good idea. Do you," he said looking at Gladrock, "have any recommendations?"

Harry missed the look of surprise on the goblin's faces. "I can't think of anyone off the top of my head. But I do recommend that the people you have come in to Gringotts with, both Mr. Hagrid, and Mr. Daniels, don't become your advisors. They are both excellent in their respective fields, but their knowledge of the wizarding world is perhaps more limited than you could use."

Harry nodded at the goblin's recommendation. There was truth to what he said. Ten minutes later, Harry and Tom left Gringotts. On their way back to the cauldron, it was getting near dinnertime; Harry told Tom everything about the emancipation process and his needing a family advisor. He left out the goblin's recommendations. Tom had an idea.

"Harry, while we're in the area, why don't you go talk with Mr. Ollivander? He might be willing to become your advisor, or at least recommend someone." Tom suggested.

Harry turned to him. "What do you know about him?"

Tom shrugged, "Nothing really. He was a wandmaker here in the Alley before I was born. I think he was a wandmaker before my grandfather was born. His shop has always been there. He does project a mystical aura; it seems like he knows things. But he has helped me on a few occasions. The only thing I really know is his full name, Emanuel Ollivander. But he's always struck me as a very knowledgeable person, someone who knows there way around the wizarding world. I think he might be a good advisor. Anyway, it doesn't hurt to ask."

And so for the second time in three days, Harry found himself walking in Ollivander's wand shop. The bell rang as it had when he first arrived and the shop was just as dusty. And Ollivander was nowhere to be seen.

"Back again, Mr. Potter." A voice from the shadows declared. Harry only jumped about three inches the second time. He turned to see Mr. Ollivander, the grey eyes staring at him. "Eleven inches, holly and phoenix feather." He continued to stare at Harry. "I assume this isn't about your wand. So what can I do for you?"

Harry found himself extremely nervous. What could he possibly say in this situation? "Er, I was at Gringotts today to become emancipated, and to be fully emancipated, my parents stipulated I needed an advisor. I wanted to ask you about taking the position."

Mr. Ollivander continued to stare at him. Finally after a moment of silence he broke it. "Tell me how you came to be here today, Mr. Potter."

That really confused Harry. What did he mean? "I don't understand what you're asking."

Ollivander continued to stare. "Of course you don't." He seemed to be speaking more to himself than to Harry. "You can't feel the twist of destiny, the change in the tides." He cleared his throat. "What I meant was: why you are here? To my knowledge, you were supposed to be back in your aunt's house in Surrey by now."

"How di-id you know about-t my relatives?" Harry asked in a shaky whisper.

Ollivander gazed back at him neutrally. "You told me."

"I did?" Harry asked blankly.

"Or rather, your memories told me." Ollivander added.

"Why did you look at my memories?" Harry asked. He was beginning to get angry. Ollivander could see Harry's memories?

"To gain a better knowledge of you as a person," Ollivander answered.

"What gave you the right to look through my memories?" Harry demanded.

"You didn't shield your mind, and I needed to teach you a lesson. Always beware of Legilimens," Ollivander told him. "You might be angry that I looked through your memories and used the knowledge against you, but what would have happened if I had been someone with malicious intent? By looking into your mind, I could have access to your history, taunt you with your worst fears, and hit you where it hurt. You need to learn that lesson fast."

"You saw everything." Harry stated, a feeling of shock overwhelming him. He sank down into a chair he just noticed.

"Yes, I did. I saw your relatives, the life you lived, how you suffered; everything. And I know what you want. An Advisor." Ollivander said.

"You told me when I was here for a wand that great things could be expected of me?" Harry questioned.

"Greatness is such an undefined term in reality. What does it mean to be great? You seemed repulsed when I said He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named did great things. He did though. Voldemort rediscovered magic to a degree never seen before. He immersed himself in it, turned back the clock to olden days of wizardry. He had a degree of control, of power, of knowledge, that will almost certainly never be seen again. Few in history could match him. And yet it twisted him. His greatness did not endure. Only his legacy of fear, of hatred, remains. To have the knowledge, the power; would be an almost impossible challenge for you, Mr. Potter. There is more to magic than you know, than I know, than anyone in history really knew. But for you, I see some potential. You have some of the power and some of the qualities. What you don't have is the degree of control, of knowledge, of tenacity to be truly great. You have it ingrained in you to hold back, to make sure you fail. The Dursleys have indeed done much damage to you. But above all, knowledge is power, and you know nothing of this world- thus, you are almost completely powerless." Ollivander took a breath. He stared at Harry again, his silvery eyes seeming to penetrate to the very depths of Harry's soul. "What specifics do you know about the position of advisor?"

"I don't really know anything about the position." Harry said bluntly.

Ollivander began pacing. "The position of advisor dates back to the middle ages. Lords, concerned about the burdens their youth would endure inheriting and governing titles and estates, created the position. It was a safeguard to ensure that their youth, enamored with wealth, did not spend it all unwisely, at least, for a time. What it basically entails is that an older person, with no direct relationship to the emancipated minor, advises the wizard on matters and helps their magical, and sometimes muggle, education along. It was typically a position of prestige and power as an advisor was seen as someone who exerted powerful influence over his lord's sphere of influence. They didn't have a veto power over the actions of the young lords, but they had ways of making sure the young lords behaved properly and didn't damage their standing in the world. It fell out of favor as the Age of Enlightenment ended. It is a tremendous honor to be seen as an advisor for an ancient house. That said, I would like to ask you a few questions, even though I know the answers, before I agree to become your advisor."

"How much do you know about the magical world?" This was Ollivander's first question.

"Next to nothing," Harry replied honestly.

Ollivander looked to accept that and continued, "Why, when you were at the Dursleys, did you let them force you to dumb down your grades?"

Harry lowered his eyes. "I didn't really have any alternative that wouldn't have gotten me punished."

"Now that you're going to Hogwarts, away from the Dursleys and their control, are you going to continue to dumb down your grades and your intellect?" Ollivander asked.

"I'm going to try my best to learn magic," Harry replied.

"Do or do not. There is no try." Ollivander mocked. "And after you see how difficult it is to learn magic; will you give up? Will you prove the Dursleys right, that you're just a worthless freak?"

Harry felt himself losing control. What the hell gave him the right to say that? He tried to control it, but he was just too angry. There was a flash and Ollivander was blasted backwards, right into the wall of the shop. There were a few seconds where Ollivander and the wall merged, before he crumbled. Harry walked over to him, unaware of silver light issuing outwards. "I AM NOT WORTHLESS!" he shouted.

Ollivander sat up and laughed which confused Harry and dampened his anger. "You've just taken your first step, Harry." He continued to laugh, and his laugh was truly unsettling.

"What's so funny," Harry snarled.

Ollivander continued to chuckle. "I remember the scared little boy who entered my shop two days ago. You might have been physically healed with your trip yesterday, but now you're on the road to a mental recovery." He stood up finally. "You need to be taught, Mr. Potter, how to better respond to antagonization. A calculated response will perhaps solve the problem, while an instinctive response sometimes makes it worse." He brushed his clothing off.

"But that was a test, Mr. Potter, to see how you reacted. You will need to learn how to react better, but I needed to see that you wouldn't stand blatant provocation. This is yet another example of why you need to defend your mind. Would you want any mind reader to have access to our past?"

Harry shook his head. "But what gives you the right to say those things to me?"

Ollivander peered at him. "Because Mr. Potter, if you want me as your advisor, you need to know that I will push you. You have potential, potential to change the world, as much potential as a young dark haired lad who came into my shop fifty years ago who walked out with a thirteen and a half inch wand made of yew with a core of a phoenix feather." Harry shivered. Voldemort. "He was not always Voldemort. Do you think his parents named him Voldemort? I saw his past, his life at the orphanage. It was extremely similar to your life at the Dursleys. And in response to the constant aggression and opposition that faced him, he developed magical power. But he developed it in a different direction than you did. Instead of enduring, he went on the offense. He put his magical talents to use terrorizing his fellow orphans. He had as much magical power as you do, but he had a slightly better degree of control. Your magical power is mostly reactionary, developed to respond to your relations. And once he started on that path, he could never turn back. If I am going to become your advisor, I need to know that I won't be unleashing the next Voldemort on the world."

Harry was horrified. "You think I could ever become like him?" he whispered.

Ollivander stared right into his eyes. "I think that both you and young Tom Riddle have extremely similar backgrounds. And you both have extremely similar magical powers. And I see you, with the life that you have lived, teetering on the edge. There is only so much a person can endure before they snap; they lose complete control of themselves, become a shadow of what they once were, or twist and warp their ideals and strike out at an unfair world. You have a similar drive to Voldemort. And I'm not the only person who will be making comparisons. Any person who knew Voldemort from childhood will be comparing you two and seeing mirror images."

"I could never become like him." Harry whispered. "He killed my parents."

"Yes and the same people who would be comparing you and Voldemort would be asking if that means that it is revenge what motivates you. They will wonder what would happen if they did anything to cross you; would you desire revenge the same as you would on Voldemort." Ollivander replied.

Harry stood up. "I could never become like him. The thought of what he did, murdering families, killing innocent people, ripping families apart. I couldn't do it."

"No one is innocent once their parents have left the room," Ollivander countered. "What if you encountered a man who you are sure has committed nefarious deeds- murder, rape, theft, so on- and it is a curse from you that would stop him forever. He can't go to prison, he would just break out, and the current government would just let him go because he would play on their love of money. In such a situation, there is the light path, and there is the dark path, but would you find the right path?"

Harry took a breath. This was a tough question. How could he respond to this? "I would use err-legilimency to determine the truth. If he has committed the crimes, and could just break out or be broken out of prison, and he could just pay people off, and he felt no regret, I would-" he took another breath. "I would end his life. If he had committed these crimes in the past, and could get out and start again, then I wouldn't want the innocent families to suffer because I decided to show mercy and it wasn't due. But killing is almost never acceptable. And the above criteria would all have to be valid. If I started to kill innocent people just because I could, or in a fit of self-righteousness, then I would hope someone would take me down."

Ollivander looked at him in approval. "That is exactly what I wanted to know, Mr. Potter. To know that you believe sometimes people can't be redeemed. That not everyone deserves a second, or third, or fourth, chance, when the price is so high. But that you believe that in almost every case, killing is not an option, or not an option you have the right to act on." He looked out the window, watching the Alley get progressively dark for a few moments. "I see the potential for greatness in you. And I will help advise you in any way I can. Come, let's go to Gringotts. There is no time like the present to get

all the paperwork done." Ollivander led a very confused Harry out of his shop.

Harry and Mr. Ollivander walked back up the street to Gringotts. Once in the lobby, Harry noticed how empty the place was, and that there were only a few goblin tellers open. He followed Ollivander to the nearest open one. "I am here to sign an advisor contract for Lord Harold James Potter," Ollivander said to the goblin. The goblin signaled another goblin over to cover for him.

"I will lead you to Master Gladrock." He told them as they began following him. Soon they were back in a familiar gleaming white office. Gladrock came in a few minutes later.

"Mr. Potter, is this the person you wish to appoint as your advisor?" Gladrock said gesturing to Ollivander.

"Yes, Gladrock, I wish to appoint Emanuel Ollivander to the position of Advisor to the Noble and Most Ancient House of Potter." Harry answered. Gladrock had coached him on how to appoint someone as his advisor before he left the bank.

Gladrock turned to Mr. Ollivander. "Do you, Emanuel Ollivander, accept the appointment to the position of advisor?"

"I do." Ollivander replied as he raised his wand.

"And do you accept the responsibility to the House of Potter and its future that is now vested within you?" Gladrock asked.

"I do." Ollivander repeated.

"And do you swear to do your best during your term of service to the House of Potter?"

"I do." Ollivander said. There was a flash of bright light signaling a successful contract agreement. The first part was done.

"Then, Mr. Ollivander, sign these documents binding your declarations to that effect." Gladrock said pushing the necessary documentation towards Ollivander.

Ollivander took a quill and began signing the documents that would make him advisor to Harry. After a few minutes of signing, he pushed the document pile back to Gladrock.

He smiled. "Congratulations, Mr. Emanuel Ollivander, you are now the advisor to Lord Harold James Potter, the lasting remaining member of the Potter family." He turned to Harry. "Now that you are fully emancipated and a fully fledged Lord, here is your family ring." A goblin brought in a box containing two rings. Ollivander picked up the larger and more detailed ring and placed it on Harry's index finger. Harry noticed it depicted a griffin, the head of an eagle prominently displayed, with the family motto bordering on the edges. The ring resized itself to fit perfectly. He then took the smaller ring and placed it on Ollivander's outstretched hand. "These rings denote you as Lord Potter and you," he said turning to Ollivander, "as advisor to the Potter family." He turned to Harry. "You can never remove the ring, but it will remain hidden from those who you don't want to see it." Gladrock cleared his throat. "I know it's getting late but there are a few pieces of business left to discuss." He pushed a paper towards Harry. "These are families that you can inherit, due to the fact that they have either died off or members of the family been incarcerated."

Possible Inheritances for Lord Harry James Potter

Black Family- Lord Black (Next in line for Lord Black incarcerated.)

Slytherin Family- No title (Family inheritance won from duel with last Lord: Thomas Marvolo Riddle Jr.)

Peverell Family- Lord Peverell (Only remaining descendent)

Harry looked up to see Ollivander's silver eyes glued to the parchment. He turned to Gladrock. "What can you tell me about these families?"

"The Black Family was one of our most wealthy and prestigious clients at one point. They also had an extremely dark reputation attached to their names. The last member known to die off was Walbulga Black. One of her son's, Regulus, is assumed dead, and the other Sirius, well-" he trailed off looking uncertain.

Harry caught the look. "Tell me please?"

"Sirius Black is in Azkaban prison. He is a Death Eater, one of Voldemort's followers, who killed thirteen people and is suspected of betraying your family to Voldemort." Gladrock finished looking apologetic.

Harry thought for a moment. This man! He calmed himself, not the time, not the place. "Can you get me the transcript from the trial please, for a fee?"

Gladrock had another uncertain look on his face. "There was no trial."

Harry stared. "Okay, then how do you know he betrayed my parents to Voldemort, or even killed the thirteen people?" he asked slowly.

"I'll get you the details. You should have them in two weeks." The goblin promised. "Anyway, back to the possible inheritances." Harry nodded for him to continue. "The Slytherin family is famous for one of its members, Salazar Slytherin, being a founder of Hogwarts. His vault only contains a few books and little, but it is rumored that he left a secret chamber in Hogwarts for his heir to make use of, though it has never been discovered in a thousand years." He cleared his throat and continued. "Finally, the Peverell family is one of the most ancient families. Dating back to Ancient Greece, the family was held in high regard for their mastery of the various magical fields. Many aspects of modern wizardry are credited to the Peverells but they were thought to have died off in the 16th century."

Ollivander whistled. "Impressive family you have, Harry." Harry almost turned to stare at his new advisor. The emotionless, mystical side of Ollivander was gone; here was a normal person, like any other.

While Gladrock was explaining about the families Harry could inherit from, a goblin brought in three boxes holding the family rings. The rings merged with the Potter family ring to show the Potter family crest in the middle with the three other family crests bordering around it. The Slytherin family crest prominently displayed a green snake. The Peverell family crest have a weird shape; an equilateral triangle with a line in the middle and a circle in the center of the triangle eclipsing the line at the top and bottom. The final crest

depicted a skull above three birds with the family motto, "toujour pur", bordering around it. Ollivander looked at the ring in appreciation.

"Can you bring us to the vaults?" Harry asked Gladrock.

"Certainly, Gringotts is always open, as long as business is profitable," was Gladrock's reply as he summoned a goblin. "Frostaxe, take Mr. Potter and his advisor to the Potter, Black, Peverell, and Slytherin family vaults."

Mr. Ollivander and Harry followed Frostaxe to a cart they would take down. Before they got in, Ollivander turned to Harry. "On our way down, can I have a look at your family tree?"

Harry took it from a pocket in his robe and handed it to him before clambering into the cart. Ollivander got into the cart and they were soon on their way. It was a good fifteen minutes before the cart grounded to a halt. Frostaxe exited first.

"Potter vault," he said as he disabled the protections. Harry walked into it and stopped dead.

He never heard Ollivander sidle up alongside him. "Yes it is impressive, Lord Potter." That broke Harry out of his trance.

He was still dumbstruck. "All this. I mean..." he trailed off. Words couldn't describe the huge mound of gold in front of him.

"Mr. Potter," said Ollivander in a brisk tone. "I appreciate that considering your upbringing, you never thought you'd have this much wealth to your name. But we have to move. Think like a goblin; time is money. Come let's get all the books here. I have a bottomless bag with me."

That finally prompted Harry to move. He followed Ollivander over to where the books were kept. A huge library, two thousand books on various subjects resided there. Harry saw books on every known school of magic. In the center of the makeshift library, lying on a brass pedestal was a huge book with a crest on the cover matching the one on the family ring.

"That is the family grimoire, Harry." Harry looked over at Ollivander. "Family grimoires are treasure troves of information. They can only

be read by a relation to the house or someone granted permission by the head of house. They contain magical self-updating information on members of the family, spells and magical discoveries of the members, private family information, locations of any family properties or secured areas, and access to private family spells. Every family has an area in magic where they are more capable. Some families even have multiple areas. With all their blood in your veins, you may be able to master several schools of magic. But enough talk. Put all of the books in the vault into this bag, please." Harry spent a half-hour putting all the books into the bottomless bag. When he finished, finally placing the Potter Family Grimoire into the bag, Ollivander picked it up, tucked it inside his robes, and they went to depart the vault. On the way out of the vault, Harry asked his advisor something that had been on his mind since Ollivander's explanation.

"Mr. Ollivander, what was the Potter family specialty?" he asked.

Ollivander never broke stride. "The Potter family had specialties in two areas; transfiguration and wards."

They exited the Potter family vault, and Harry turned to Frostaxe for another question.

"Excuse me, Frostaxe," he had the goblin's attention. "Is there any way I can withdraw money from my vault without coming to Gringotts?"

Frostaxe grinned. "I can arrange a moneybag tied to your family vault for a nominal fee."

"What protections can you put on it?" was Harry's next question as they departed to the Black Family vault.

"We can put blood protections and anti-theft charms on the moneybag, preventing thieves from stealing it and from stealing your money if they ever managed, unlikely as it would be, to break the first set of charms." Frostaxe answered.

"Make it happen," Harry shouted back over the roar of the cart. They were going at top speed. Five minutes later, they arrived at the Black Vault.

As Frostaxe disabled the protections on the vault, Ollivander turned to Harry. "The Black family was much wealthier than the Potter family. They have a lot more gold. Keep that in mind; I want to move quickly."

The protections ended, and Harry walked in. He stared at the enormous pile of gold for a few seconds before he shook himself out of his stupor and headed after Ollivander towards the books. He noticed a smaller library than was kept in the Potter vault and wondered what happened to the books and what the family specializing in.

Ollivander answered his unasked question. "Their specialty was dark magic, dueling magic, and magic used for hiding things. The Black family kept the vast majority of their library sequestered away at the family home. The grimoire holds the location." He gestured to a book with the family crest emblazed on the cover situated on a pedestal. Harry started loading books into Ollivander's bottomless bag. He loaded in the grimoire last and he and Ollivander departed.

It was another twenty minutes before they arrived in front of the Slytherin vault. Frostaxe undid most of the protections before he turned to Harry. He gestured to a snake adorning the front of the vault. "You need to speak to it before you can gain access, Lord Potter."

"Hello," he called out to the serpent, except it came out as a hiss.

The serpent animated and raised its head to be eye level with Harry. "Who dares to try and enter the Slytherin family vault?"

Harry marshalled his courage and spoke. "Harry James Potter, the inheritor of the Slytherin Estate."

The snake bit his hand and Harry clutched it in pain. "You are worthy." The vault opened as the snake returned to its starting location and the pain ceased in Harry's hand.

Harry and Mr. Ollivander entered the Slytherin vault, noting the almost non-existent amount of gold. "The Slytherin family fell into poverty and sold off many of their relics. Fortunately for us, they never considered family tomes valuable enough to be sold off. They specialized in battle magic, also known as dueling magic, and

parselmagic. It is a curious branch of magic. It can only be done when the user is speaking parseltongue and it is most useful for warding and healing." He gestured to the books, at most fifty, and the grimoire, again placed in the center of the library. After five minutes of loading books into the bag, they departed that vault, and headed to the last and most mysterious vault; the Peverell vault.

The arrived outside the Slytherin family vault. The vault itself looked very ordinary. Frostaxe turned to Harry. "We protect this vault by making it seem as ordinary as possible. Protection through ignorance. It was as the Peverells wished."

Harry looked at him. "When did they ask you to first start protecting their things?"

Frostaxe grinned. "Our records state they contracted with us around 500 B.C."

Harry was stunned. "That's an old vault."

The goblin laughed as he began to undo the defenses. The vault might have looked ordinary, but the defenses were extraordinary. After fifteen minutes of intense concentration, Frostaxe stood back. He waved his hand a final time and the vault opened.

Harry and Mr. Ollivander stepped in, wondering what they would find. They weren't disappointed. Scrolls, books, and manuals adorned the walls of the vault. It held no gold; only knowledge.

"My word," Ollivander breathed. "The rumors were true. The Peverells were masters of so many different types of magic."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked him curiously. The vault of knowledge seemed impressive to Harry, but it had apparently bowled Ollivander over.

Ollivander waved his hands around. "Do you not see? Tomes on transfiguration, potions, charms, wards, curses, light magic, dark magic, creatures we'd never dreamed of, plants that eluded our gaze, the nature of magic itself, and so much more. And they were masters of all of it. Look tomes in Greek, Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, Latin, Norse, so many spells in so many languages; a collection of magic through time. The famous library of Alexandria was supposedly absorbed into this collection. You know, there has

always been an academic question of whether spells cast in certain languages had more power than other languages. That is modern wizarding cultures uses Latin; it is believed to be the most powerful language to cast spells in. But all this... it is fantastic." He took a breath. "This is perhaps as big a library of magical knowledge as the whole of Atlantis."

"What about Atlantis?" Harry asked, attempting to subtly bring his attention back to him.

It had the desired effect. Ollivander refocused on Harry as he answered. "Atlantis, the lost kingdom, is considered a treasure trove of knowledge and fortune. But most rumors and myths say that it has been warded in such a way to make it disappear from the world. But I digress. You are right, Mr. Potter, we need to get back on task."

He pulled out his bottomless bag and began summoning books into it while Harry grabbed some loaded them in. It was nearly two hours later when they loaded in the last book and Harry picked up the treasured Peverell grimoire. The crest from the ring was identical to the book's cover. Harry deposited it in Ollivander's bag, and they exited, leaving the vacant vault behind. It was a quiet ride back to the surface as Harry and Mr. Ollivander both sat contemplating the magic they now had access to. Harry made sure before leaving Gringotts to get a money bag tied to the Potter vault like Frostaxe mentioned.

It was nearly nine when Harry and Mr. Ollivander arrived back at his wand shop. Once inside, Ollivander walked to the back of his shop and returned a minute later with a book: Occlumency for Beginners. He handed it to Harry. "I will keep the books for now to organize a cataloguing system. It should be done by noon tomorrow. I will attempt to purchase any books not in your possession to complete the catalogue. Come see me at noon. Oh, and two more things. Read the occlumency book and sort through your memories. You won't go far without a knowledge of it, Mr. Potter. Oh and prepare for a shopping trip tomorrow, there are several things you'll need to be successful. Until then, peace be with you, Lord Potter."

And Harry left Ollivander's wand shop more confused than when he arrived. He had a quick meal at the Leaky Cauldron, he was getting tired, and within a half hour he'd retired for the night. A feeling of

excitement was growing within he; he didn't know what would happen, but he was certain something would.

Chapter Two: Introductions

Harry awoke up early the next morning. How early, he didn't know. After putting on his glasses, he tried to find a watch or clock and realized he had none in reach. Finally he began rummaging through The Standard Book of Spells Grade 1 for a solution. He finally hit upon the tempus charm, meant to tell the time in the current location. He pulled out his wand, and duplicating what the book described, waved his wand in the correct motion and uttered, "Tempus."

A smoky cloud appeared that read 7:16 before it faded away. But Harry was really pleased with himself. He'd just consciously cast his first spell. Sure he'd done that levitation charm back at the doctor's, but that was only for the doctor to see. He didn't really know that charm, he couldn't have done it on a whim at this moment; but he knew the tempus charm now. The first of many spells he'd know, he assured himself. He dressed quickly and headed downstairs for breakfast. Soon he was back in his room after a delicious breakfast. Another tempus charm and he saw that it was eight thirty. He pulled out the Occlumency book Ollivander gave him the previous night and he began to read. He kept his wand close to periodically check the time. At half-past Eleven he exited the room, book in hand, and headed to Ollivander's. On his way out he waved to Tom, who cast the notice-me-not charm on him; he'd already told him where he was going and about Ollivander being his advisor over breakfast. A fifteen minute walk and he was right outside Ollivander's.

He entered the wand shop to see Ollivander tended to a customer, a young girl, her parents looking on neutrally. The old man had just headed to the back to get another set of wands, and the girl and her family hadn't noticed him, which meant the charm was working. He stood waiting a few minutes until Ollivander came back.

"Perhaps these shall do the trick Ms. Davis." He handed her another wand. "Willow and unicorn hair 10 and $\frac{3}{4}$ inches," he said, handing the wand to her. He noticed Harry, quietly leaning up against the white walls of his shop. "You're early, Mr. Potter." He said this to drop the effect of the notice-me-not charm Tom had put on Harry that morning. His acknowledgement meant the Davis's would actually look for Harry, and seeing as the charm fed on assumption-in particular the assumption that the person it was cast on was not present or not worthy of importance, like a fly bordering on the outskirts of a person's sight, that meant the charm had lost its

effectiveness to the people, because they would no longer assume either of those things about Harry.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Davis jumped and spun around to see the other occupant of the shop. A glimpse of his lightning bolt scar told them all they needed to know as they all, parents and daughter, continued to gape at him.

"Flies, people, flies," snarked Harry, who was beginning to get annoyed. Damn you, Ollivander.

Ollivander cleared his throat to bring their attention back to him. "As I was saying....," the girl took the wand and a shower of golden sparks emerged as she finally found her wand. "Congratulations, and use it well." He turned to the parents. "That will be five galleons."

Harry decided it was time to leave an impression. "What!" he shouted. "You charged me seven you old bastard."

Ollivander looked at him as all the other occupants of the shop stared. "Need I remind you, Mr. Potter, that it took you two hours and forty three minutes to find a wand? It took her twenty six."

Harry pretended to be dumbstruck. "You charge an extra galleon an hour?"

"No I charge an extra galleon for going over the first hour. The other was for annoying me." Ollivander replied.

"I'm hurt Ollie, I really am." Harry said as he pretended to be crumpled by Ollivander's insult.

The old man shook his head. "Five galleons please," he repeated. The Davis's finally finished paying and departed.

Before they left, the father turned to Harry. "I must say it's an honor to meet you even if the circumstances are unusual." He gestured to his daughter, who Harry noticed had light brown hair to match her father, and a kind face probably courtesy of her mother. "You'll be going to Hogwarts with Tracey."

Harry held out his hand to Tracey. She took it and blushed, the red noticeable on her light face. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Tracey Davis. I'll see you at Hogwarts." His instincts told her to kiss her hand, to seal the impression, he did, and got treated to the sight of her cheeks flaming. The family quickly left the shop.

As soon as they left, Harry finally came to his senses, and rounded on Ollivander. "What the hell was that?"

Ollivander chuckled. "That was to teach you two lessons. The first was one of the dangers of an accomplished legilimens. One of the many advantages legilimency provides, besides shifting through a person's head for their memories and information, is the ability to implant thoughts and suggestions in a person's head. When I saw you waiting quietly while I finished with the Davis family, I decided to implant suggestions to make you act as you did. This is yet another reason you need to learn Occlumency."

Harry wasn't placated by this. "Yeah, except I read that book cover to back and I can tell you it was useless. The author kept beginning every phrase with "I think" and "some believe." He kept redefining what Occlumency was. He tried to talk about the benefits of practicing it, but the words "unconfirmed" and "may" were splashed across the page. The author didn't even go into practicing Occlumency, just said the process starts with "clearing your mind." He never described what that entailed. It was drivel."

Ollivander was laughing heartily at this. "Then the book served its purpose. That book was meant to teach you that sometimes books are just drivel. Not every book can be trusted to enlighten you. Some books can't be trusted as far as you can throw them. Sure the author claimed they were informing the reader about "Occlumency" but it really told you nothing at all. And even if it had been a good book, it's not like a book can really teach you how exactly to close your mind to outsiders. Books can enlighten you about theories and spells and provide tips and explanations, but there is no substitute for real, practical experience." He took a breath. "But I digress. The other reason I used legilimency to manipulate your thoughts is, ironically enough, to help you."

He saw Harry's look of confusion and sighed. "I am perhaps the most gifted user of legilimency, Mr. Potter, in England. Whereas others can look into memories and plant suggestions, I can see

emotion and maintain a form of control. I have seen your past, Mr. Potter. I have seen your emotions, Mr. Potter. There are limits; you do need to be in my presence, after all. But, for all intents and purposes, I have seen you. And I can tell that your greatest ambition, to be "normal", is not possible. All modesty aside, you are powerful, with more potential than anyone in a long time, you are wealthy, courtesy of your parents and ancestors, and you are smart, capable of near genius intellect once we get you up to scratch. And above all, none of that is normal." He could see Harry was unconvinced, so he tried a different tactic. "What is so great about being normal? Normal for you was being starved and abused by your relatives, was it not?" He could see Harry was hurt by that. "You can be great, Mr. Potter. You have some of the prerequisites. You can be, perhaps, the greatest wizard ever. For you, the sky is the limit." Silence was met by his proclamation. He let it continue for a few minutes before he spoke. "But, one of the many aspects of being great is knowing how to handle people. No wizard, no matter how great or powerful, can do everything on their own. How people perceive you is very important. Tell me Harry, think back to your introduction to the Davis family. How do you think they perceive you?"

Harry thought hard about his encounter with the Davis's. He remembered Tracey, her long brown hair hanging behind her head, and the parents, stern and strained. He finally answered, "I think it both threw them off balance and impressed them with my unorthodox style. In addition, with the familiarity I seemed to have with you, it made me seem like someone with friends in high places. A mystical old wandmaker and the boy-who-lived, with a very distinct style, would knock many people off balance. Plus, the courtesy I showed to the daughter will make an impression once Hogwarts comes around."

Ollivander smiled. "Correct on all counts, Mr. Potter. If you want people to know you as Harry, instead of the boy-who-lived, then you must introduce them to Harry. The boy-who-lived is a persona who wrestles with dragons, storms castles, and saves young maidens from rampaging nundus. Harry Potter, however, is an intelligent, powerful, outgoing, fun young man. Or he should become that anyway. Bridging the gap is something important for you to do. But for now, enough about that. I mentioned to you yesterday that you were going to be taking a shopping trip today. Now, as you may be aware, this is the peak season for wand purchases. So while I could leave the shop any other time of year and just close up at dinnertime,

I can't today. A wand is the first thing most families purchase for their kids, and not everyone can come back later. So," he withdrew a paper from his robe pocket and handed it to Harry, "I have prepared a list of items that will prove useful to you and where you can acquire them. All of the goods and stores are in Diagon Alley. Some will have to be custom ordered. If anyone gives you trouble, tell them that you are an adult, or if necessary, that Ollivander sent you."

Before he left, Harry had one more question for Ollivander. "You mentioned that with your skill in legilimency, you can control anyone. Have you ever done this to me?" Harry was almost afraid of the answer.

Ollivander gazed at him. "No. Never. Of course, you probably wouldn't believe me that easily, so I'll offer you proof." He withdrew his wand. "I, Emanuel Ollivander, have never used my ability at legilimency to control Harry Potter, except in the presence of the Davis family, and I will never do so unless it is a dire emergency, for magic to judge. So mote it be." He flashed blue. "I'm still alive, Harry. When I used legilimency earlier, it was to prove a point. I've never used it on you at any other time. But this is a point I wanted to make to you. Always question people's motives. If I had manipulated you, I might have stolen all of the family knowledge and money you had. I am certain that people will try to use you. But remember, their schemes can be put to your ends. People are schemers. They like to plan their lives. When their plans involve you, always find some way to exploit it. But that's enough about that. Now get going, you have a lot of shopping to do, and that's not all we're going to be doing today."

And with that Harry left Ollivander's shop to begin a shopping quest. He looked at the first item on Ollivander's list. Robes. Robes? He had robes. He turned and walked back into Ollivander's. He saw the old man waiting almost expectantly for him. "What do you mean robes?" Harry blurted out.

Ollivander looked at him like he was an idiot. "Robes are the things most wizards wear, Mr. Potter." He said slowly. "Did you not notice what you've been wearing for the last two days?"

Harry waved that aside. "No, what I meant was why did you put robes on the shopping list? You said it yourself; I've been wearing robes for the last few days."

Ollivander sighed. "Mr. Potter, don't you understand that you shouldn't wear your school robes in public. You need something befitting your station." He saw Harry about to argue. "It can be something as simple as school robes with the Potter family crest on them where the symbol for Hogwarts would be. But either way, you need robes with your family crest."

And with that, Harry left the shop and set off again to complete the shopping list. He went to Madam Malkin's as directed, and got her to begin fitting him for robes. After a half hour, he walked out with a receipt for two dozen robes with the Potter family crest emblazoned on them. She said they'd be ready in about a week. He reopened the list to see what was next. A trunk? Of course, a trunk, how was he planning to transport his stuff without a trunk? All of the items he already had were too damn bulky to begin with. He reread it again and noticed words under it that he'd missed the first time he read it. Multi-compartment, full-size walk-in library, Storage compartment, student items compartment for a typical Hogwarts day, varying security and protection charms listed, convenience charms, custom made. He had listed a shop he and Hagrid had walked past when they were shopping for school supplies. Five minutes later, Harry was inside the store that sold trunks, though it was actually a furniture store that did a side-business in trunks; Family Furniture. He saw that the store was unoccupied and a portly man was running the business.

"What do you want, boy? I'm about to close up for lunch." His tone immediately angered Harry, who had grown use to similar reactions from his Uncle, but he managed to keep his cool. He decided to do away with the pleasantries and get down to business.

"What I want, what's most important to me, is that you make me a trunk. Mr. Ollivander sent me here, recommended your store, the least you can do is show potential customers some courtesy." Harry replied.

The man adopted a gentlemanly visage and soon Harry walked out of the shop after the man gave him a receipt for a five-compartment trunk with all the features Ollivander had required and a bunch of security, protection, and convenience charms placed on it, and a desire to bathe himself after so much time listening to the man's oily accent. Between the robes and the trunk, Harry had just spent about

3,000 galleons. He knew he could afford it, but it did make him pause, spending that much money. He looked at Ollivander's list. Lunch; funny old bastard.

Harry sat down to lunch at Florean Fortescue's Ice cream parlor. A quick and delicious meal, now that the Dursley's couldn't starve him and he had potions to take he didn't look quite so skinny, and he was back looking at Ollivander's list. This time, he was directed to a magical apparatus store. Ollivander had listed a dozen or so items he wanted Harry to get here. So here Harry was, in front of the seedy looking store called Everything You Need but Never Knew About. Harry walked in and there was an old man, similar in demeanor to Ollivander, tending the counter. He looked up at Harry.

"Good day, Mr. Potter." He wheezed.

"Ollie told you I was coming?" Harry guessed.

The old man laughed. "He did. I normally have compulsion wards that keep clients away unless they've been recommended to me. He handed me a list of what you need, and, oh, I see you have another list. Let's compare them."

He and Harry set the lists down side beside. After a few moments of study, the old man looked up. "Well, that's interesting. He spent about two thirds of the list telling you to get dark detectors. I agree with him about the pensive, and I'll put in an order for one right away. And the other three things I never even considered. But perhaps he's right."

Fifteen minutes later, Harry was walking out of another shop with a receipt and a promise for his order to be ready next week. He spent the next few hours continuing Ollivander's list. The next stop was a series of apothecaries to pick up Potions supplies, ingredients, apparatuses, and a few already completed potions. Another order that would take a week to fill. Harry did have to shake his head at some of the other things on the list; pranking material. But he bought it. And amazingly was able to walk out of the store with it that day.

At five, Harry was back to Ollivander store. His final set of purchases was a basic warding kit and a few arithmancy charts; all of which he walked out with and was carrying with him. The store was empty and it seemed like Ollivander was waiting for him.

"Excellent, Mr. Potter. You are early. Set your things down." Ollivander was beaming.

"Thanks Ollie." Harry began to put his stuff down and froze. "Since when do I call you Ollie?" he asked slowly.

"Since I uploaded it to your mind this morning," Ollivander deadpanned.

"YOU WHAT!" Harry shouted.

"Calm, Harry. This morning, when I gave my oath that I'd never used legilimency on you at any other time and swore to never use it against you, I protected myself via a half truth. I never told you what exactly I did with my legilimency, when I used it." He took a breath, his silver eyes staring into Harry's, and his normally emotionless demeanor reflected pain. "You see Harry, as you and I know; you were rather damaged by your time with your "family." Your intelligence, exceptional as it was, was wounded, though it's getting back to its peak, but most importantly, you lack social skills. Getting bullied and isolated by your cousin and relatives means your interactions at Hogwarts would have been stifled. Unless, of course, I helped you to overcome this problem." He continued to gaze at Harry. "There is a technique, most accomplished legilimens can't do this but I can, whereby you can use legilimency to impart information. I, having lived a long time, and run in most social circles, know the little ins and outs of manners purebloods expect. I also, though sometimes it seems unlikely, was once a child in the very same position as you; a brilliant mind, when utilized, power in spades, and extremely awkward with other people. But having already gone through it, I gifted you with social skills, as amazing as it seems. You call me Ollie, because it is a cheeky and sarcastic way of bringing attention to yourself, and the mentor relationship that exists."

Harry looked horrified. "You messed around with my brain?"

"I already explained to you that I did," Ollivander answered. "I know what it seems like, I crossed the line, but I acted in your best interest. This is really just making up for lost time."

"Did you upload anything else, like say, the recipe for perfect lobster thermidor?" Harry bit back sarcastically.

"Harry, you need to learn a few lessons from this. I know you are angry, but don't let it rule you." Ollivander sighed. "First, you need to learn the danger of doublespeak. It isn't that bad a side effect comparatively but you will have a killer headache tomorrow morning. Second, and more importantly, you need to learn the value of questioning. This morning, you accepted my oath that I'd never used legilimency on you except for one time, but you forgot to ask what I did with the opportunity. The list I gave you is further proof. You have spent a good ten fifty galleons on a bunch of items just because I gave you list and told you they were needed. But you only asked why they were needed when you saw the first item; robes. In this instance, everything on that list you will probably put to use in the future. But what if you hadn't? I could have just wasted fifty thousand galleons. Always question, always ask why. This is even more important because of something I just discovered going through your family papers."

He gestured to a portfolio of paperwork with the familiar Potter Family crest adorning the top. Harry looked mutinous.

"Oh don't be like that. I was handed the paperwork for all the families you inherited as we left, to keep you abreast of all relevant matter?"

Harry cut him off, taking Ollivander's lesson about questioning to heart. "Define relevant, O' advisor of mine."

Ollivander chuckled. "Relevant matters include marriage contracts, property, business investments, and relations. As the last Potter, the last item is null. You will be happy to know that of the four families, there is only one marriage contract, from the Black line, which you can buy out of for fifty thousand galleons."

Harry stopped him. "WOAH, whoa, back up a second Ollie. Marriage contracts? These people still do that?"

Ollivander outright laughed at him. "Of course they do, Harry. Haven't you noticed that this is a rather medieval society?" He cleared his throat. "Anyway, as I was saying, there is a marriage contract, courtesy of the Black line, between the youngest eligible male, you, and the oldest unmarried daughter of the Greengrass line. The contract was originally made with Regulus Black and Ophelia Greengrass in mind, but with Regulus's admittance into the Death

Eaters, he became unable to fulfill the contract obligations and bought out. Hence, the contract is still in effect and passes to you. Fortunately, you can buy out any time before your seventeenth birthday."

Harry collapsed into Ollivander's rickety chair. He'd been in the wizarding world for four days and there was talk of marriage? "Okay Ollie, it's obvious I now need to know more than I ever wanted about wizarding marriages. So hit me."

Ollivander smacked him on the head. "OW." Harry yelped.

"You said to hit you," was Ollivander's sardonic reply. "You should be clearer Harry." He stared into space for a minute. "Anyway, marriage in the wizarding world is very complicated. As you may have noticed, it is a very male-oriented society. The only prominent female in charge of a ministry department is Amelia Bones, the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Any other women in the ministry that are high up certainly aren't there for their competence. Most prominent males generally have a wife and a woman on the side. Polygamy is technically legal in the Wizarding world, though it is frowned upon. Not because of the morality, of course, but because it is seen as cheaper to have a wife and then a mistress, or in some cases mistresses. Anyway, marriage contracts are standard practices for the most diehard pureblood families, to keep their blood thoroughly tainted, I assure you. I wouldn't worry about it, Harry. But just to be safe, buy out of it next summer. You'll still have the money, but you'll have a chance to meet the Greengrass girl and then make up a valid reason for rejecting the contract. If you just bought out now, it wouldn't look as good. Now, all talk of marriage and contracts aside, we need to get back to what I was saying earlier, a discrepancy in your files."

"I reviewed the family trees you have, and I must say, they contain several prominent family members. First, I can tell you that your mother was from a line of squibs, not a muggleborn. She appears on the Slytherin family tree, a distant offshoot from Lord Voldemort. Thus, you have a very distant relation to Voldemort. If he knew about your mother, then that was probably a reason she and your father were attacked, to do away with the last competition for the title. This of course means that your aunt and cousin are in fact squibs. We still have no idea why Voldemort tried to kill you, but I will continue my research on that matter. Whatever the reason, it had to

have been a good one, which is both worrisome and an opportunity. Anyway, in reviewing the Potter family tree, two names jumped out at me; Godric Gryffindor and Rowena Ravenclaw. Three of the four founders of Hogwarts." He finished to a shocked audience.

Harry shook himself. "Mr. Ollivander, could you please explain to me about Hogwarts, the house system, the founders, and anything related?"

Ollivander chuckled, something that was quickly becoming a familiar sight to Harry. "Well, first, you have the houses of Hogwarts; Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin. Each house has personality traits a founder favored and a focus on acquiring people with those traits. For Gryffindor, the traits are chivalry, daring, and bravery. For Hufflepuff, the traits are loyalty, camaraderie, and tenacity. For Ravenclaw, it's the desire to learn and the willingness to acquire knowledge. And for Slytherin, it's a focus on cunning, deceit, and shrewdness. Of course, you can probably already see problems with the house system. Each trait, while good on the whole, has several negative connotations. For example, Ravenclaws are considered boring bookworms and Slytherins are always treated with distrust. Plus, judging a person when they are eleven isn't exactly a wise move. People do change. Now then, the school itself is a castle, inhabited by ghosts, moving portraits, and yes secret passages. In particular, one thing I remember from my years at Hogwarts was a room, on the seventh floor, that you walked past three times and it became whatever you wanted; The Room of Requirements. I have many fond memories of practicing wand-craft in that room. Finally, the four founders, Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin, are the founders of Hogwarts, revered by wizarding folklore. You will probably get a more in depth account from your books, but the one thing you should know ahead of time is that Slytherin supposedly left the school because he wanted to cater to a more selective clientele, or no muggleborns; the oldest record of the fight over blood purity in Britain. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. I suspect you will learn the truth from your family books."

"Wait a second," Harry said at the end of Ollivander's explanation. "When you used legilimency on me this morning, why couldn't you just upload it to me then?"

"Because, Harry, social skills and manners are mostly reflexive and instinctive, something your subconscious tells you when to use what. But knowledge like this just can't be uploaded to your mind; it is all concepts. To try it might rip your mind apart." Ollivander explained patiently. "Now then, we've gotten off and ten different explanations, so let me try again. What I wanted to inform you about was that in looking at Potter and Peverell records, I noticed an artifact that is apparently missing from your possession. The records state that your father leant out the family invisibility cloak, which has the unheard of ability to never wear out from use, to the headmaster of Hogwarts; Albus Dumbledore. This caught my attention because it was on Dumbledore who illegally placed you at your aunt." Harry gaped at him. "I have a copy of the will Harry. You were supposed to go to Sirius Black, the Azkaban resident who never got a trial, or the Longbottoms. Your parents and the Longbottoms were very close; there was a family alliance. I am sorry to inform you that Frank and Alice Longbottom, the people your parents wished keep custody of you, are in the long-care spell damage ward at St. Mungo's." He saw the horrified look on Harry's face. "After Voldemort fell, a few of his followers, Rodolphos, Rabastan, and Bellatrix Lestrange, and Barty Crouch Jr. tortured them into insanity because they believed that the couple had information on Voldemort's whereabouts. All four were subsequently caught and sentenced to life in Azkaban." A heavy silence met the end of that morose statement. Ollivander paused for a few minutes while Harry's emotions went wild. When he finally had them under control, Ollivander resumed talking. "Your parents provided for a few contingencies if your godfather and godmother were unable to assume the role."

Harry interrupted him. "You mean Alice Longbottom was my godmother?" he asked in a whisper.

Ollivander nodded solemnly. "Yes. They are still alive, but in a cruciatus induced coma; completely insane. They are survived by Augusta Longbottom, a powerful political figure, and Neville, their son."

"My god-brother," Harry whispered.

Ollivander nodded. Emotions swarmed Harry. Fear, sorrow, hate, it all swelled up inside him.

"Calm yourself," Ollivander commanded sternly. "You can't let your emotions rule you. And you can't help them now."

There were a few tense moments before his emotions receded. "And this is why you must learn Occlumency," Ollivander muttered. He cleared his throat. "Neville and Augusta Longbottom will be stopping by my shop on the tenth. She is an old friend of mine, but she's made her wishes clear that Neville should use his father's wand. I arranged the meeting to try and convince her otherwise. It will also serve to introduce you to Neville, someone who will be in your year at Hogwarts, and, if you're lucky, reestablish the alliance between the House of Longbottom and the Most Noble and Ancient House of Potter. Now, let's get back to the matter at hand. As I was saying, both of your godparents, who were first in line to get custody, were unable to take it, and so there was a second listing. This listing includes Remus Lupin, a friend of your parents with a known lycanthropy problem." He saw Harry's look of confusion. "Once a month, he turns into a werewolf." Harry shivered. He didn't mind the idea of Remus Lupin but from what he'd heard, in his few days in the wizarding world, they were dangerous creatures the general populace feared. "Obviously, the laws of the wizarding world being what they are, he could never get custody of you. Another family that was listed was the Bones family; namely Edgar and his wife Alessia. They were killed in 1980 by Death Eaters; Voldemort's followers. They are survived by a daughter, Susan, who now lives with her aunt, the aforementioned Amelia Bones, head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Incidentally, another established ally of the house of Potter. And incidentally, I received an owl from Amelia today making an appointment to get a wand on the seventeenth."

"Wait, why would she make an appointment to get her niece a wand; why not just come in?" Harry interrupted.

"It is a pureblood tradition that an appointment be made when a child becomes eligible to go off to Hogwarts and get their wand. It is seen as a rite of passage only the most intimate of family members are invited to." Ollivander explained. "We keep getting sidetracked and I'd like to get to my point today. Now where was I?" He stared into space for a moment. "Ah yes, I was talking about families who were contingencies. The other two names that were listed were Peter Pettigrew, a deceased family friend who was supposedly murdered by Sirius Black, and Filius Flitwick, the charms professor

at Hogwarts. His ineligibility is due to the fact that he has goblin heritage, which the ministry used to deny his custody. In that instance, you were supposed be placed with a magical family by the War Orphan department of the ministry, an emergency department created to deal with placing children who'd lost their parents in the conflict. And yet, you fell through a loophole. Albus Dumbledore disregarded your parents' wishes for custody, the Longbottoms, who were still sane and whole at the time, and placed you with the Dursley family. And he has your Invisibility Cloak; an important family heirloom. And he instructed Rubeus Hagrid, who is extremely loyal, but lacking in the common sense department, to deliver your Hogwarts letter. He eventually found you and got you to Diagon Alley, and probably told you ten thousand times how Dumbledore is a great man. In fact, I'm quite curious where he found his conscience. He was going to take you back to the Dursleys before he thought better of it. But nonetheless, the set of circumstances only leads to one logical conclusion: Albus Dumbledore has plans for you."

"I really don't understand what you mean," Harry replied. Why did he have to get involved with this now?

"Albus Dumbledore is a powerful figure in our world; Headmaster of Hogwarts, chief of the Wizengamot, the ruling body of the wizarding world, and Chief Mugwump of the International Confederation of Warlocks. And he's apparently directly used his influence to intervene in your life multiple times; often not to your benefit. The only logical conclusion is that he has plans for you. My advice is to be constantly on your guard, to be skeptical of him whenever he doesn't make sense or act in your benefit, and above all, question his motives. One of the most underused tools in human history is putting yourself in someone else's shoes; trying to understand why they act and think the way they do. Now you try it. You are the venerable headmaster, revered for his defeat of the Dark Wizard Grindewald and leader of the opposition against Lord Voldemort. You hold more titles than you know what to do with, have an unprecedented level of power in the wizarding world. A child comes along who manages to do what you've struggled to do for years; defeat Lord Voldemort. So what do you do? You illegally place him with a relation who hates magic and hated her sister, you keep him ignorant of the wizarding world and magic, and you keep an important family heirloom. There are only two reasons I can see for him doing that if I put myself in his place. One, he believes

Voldemort isn't gone and that he and his followers may soon be out for revenge. Granted that is a possibility. But then, where does the cloak fit in? Or two, he has plans for the young orphan; plans that center around said orphan revering him, possibly in line with the first reason. Which is why he places him in an abusive environment, sends someone loyal to him to retrieve him and be seen as a savior of sorts, and withholds the valuable heirloom until he can be seen returning it, putting himself in the orphan's good graces. Quite a conjecture you might say, but it is clear to me: Dumbledore has plans for you. So you should heed my advice, and master Occlumency. The latter we will start training on now."

Ollivander cast a tempus charm, 6:40, while Harry was coming to grips with all the information provided. "Alright Harry, this is the last thing we have to cover before you can get some dinner. Now then, I know the book I provided you was worthless. So let me tell you the benefits of Occlumency. By practicing this art, you will be able to stop legilimency attacks on your mind. But that's not the only benefit. A mastery of Occlumency involves organizing your mind and keeping any and all information in a secure location. It can also be used to hide your emotions from others; useful in poker and negotiations. It is an art all about control. This is about controlling your thoughts, your memories, and your concentration. And a secure control of these things will make non-verbal magic much easier. In fact, to a master Occlumens, using magic is much easier. But, having a firm control will also mean you can direct your concentration, solve problems easier, tune out distractions, and many more benefits that come with a firm control over your mind and your thoughts. You will be able to pull up any memory and see the details and subtleties involved. And, whatever you read, you will remember. However, seeing as you will remember it, it is all the more important to understand what you read. Truly, it is an invaluable skill to have. And you've already taken the first step, or rather, I have."

"What do you mean?" asked Harry.

"When I swore the oath to you earlier, I told you I had not used legilimency to control you. That is true. However, I have, since you offered me the position of advisor, kept a legilimency probe in your mind whenever you were in my presence." He saw Harry starting to get angry. "This wasn't to read your mind or gain information. By continually using legilimency on your mind, it has begun to

recognize my invading presence and build natural defenses. You have probably found keeping your emotions under control much easier. This is because your mind now actively resists every time I try to enter it using legilimency, and to better defend itself, it has gained a measure of control over your mind. Control that you will now use to become a master of Occlumency."

Ollivander summoned a book from a nearby shelf. "This isn't a useless book of drivel. This is a book on creating defenses and various systems of organization for your mind, as well as all the benefits, some of which I didn't cover. Read it tonight. Then, try and to turn your gaze inward. Organizing your mindscape, a term you'll be introduced to in that book, can be difficult. But I am confident you can do it." He turned and was about to walk away before he thought better of it. "Oh, and leave the stuff you bought here. I will place it with your book collection; I'm still having complications with creating the indexing system, and tracking down stray books, so it will be a few more days before you get that library."

And with that, Harry left the shop and headed back to the Leaky Cauldron. He had a delicious dinner that night. As usual, when he finished, Tom came over to chat with him. Something Ollivander said about motives stuck with him. He hemmed and hawed a bit while chatting with him and then, as Tom got up to leave, Harry finally decided to ask.

"Tom," the barkeep retook the seat he pulled up to Harry's table. "Why did you do all of this for me?"

Tom took a breath. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," Harry hesitated and almost lost his nerve, "You gave me free room and board, helped introduce me to the magical world, got me to a healer, helped me learn about my place in the world, helped me stay unnoticeable, and you even gave me a good recommendation for my advisor. Why?"

Tom sat and thought. "I suppose for a number of reasons," he began slowly. "I did owe Hagrid for favors he did in the past for me. You are the boy-who-lived, the reason our world is mostly peaceful and quiet now. I did know and like your parents. And," he hesitated, "There is a selfish reason. I know that you'll one day be even more important to our world than you are today. If worst comes to worst, I

may someday need your help. I know that sounds like I'm using you, but I assure you, I'm not. It's just," he trailed off, "The ministry keeps imposing new taxes, officials get more corrupt, and the dark wizards and witches of Britain will someday start another rebellion. If you remember me fondly, then I may one day be able to seek your protection. I suppose our relationship is symbiotic. I help you now weather the storm and make your way in the world, and swear fealty to you and do what I can, and you protect me, and redeem me." He took another breath. "To own the bar in the center of our world demands sacrifice to a large extent; sometimes morals, sometimes money, sometimes opportunity. I guess, by helping you, I'm both securing my future and finding inner peace with somewhat troubling decisions. All right, Harry?"

Harry nodded and Tom left. Harry was pleased that Tom was honest with him. He knew that he had to be getting something out of helping him, and he was grateful for his generosity and desire for peace. He was a little hurt about being used, but Tom had to look out for himself. If there was one lesson Harry carried with him from the Dursleys, it was that you needed to look out for yourself to an extent. Friends made it easier to get by in the world, but to the orphan who finds that option unattainable, self-reliance is the next best thing. And it made him feel better to know what exactly Tom got out of their relationship. He gave Harry advice and information that he probably couldn't survive without, and in exchange, he would give Tom protection and aid with which Tom someday might not be able to survive without.

Harry retired to his room. He noticed a somewhat familiar site over the last few days; his owl flying in and out of the room to hunt and sleep. Hmm, come to think of it, he'd never named the owl. He picked up a random textbook, flipped through it, and when he got to the first name that looked plausible, he called it out.

"Hedwig?" he called to the owl. It looked him in the eye, seemingly seeing through him just like Ollivander did. "Your name is Hedwig." The owl stared at him a moment and then nodded and hooted. Hedwig flew over and landed on his shoulder. After a few minutes of petting Hedwig and feeding her treats, Harry decided it was time to start studying Occlumency.

He read through the book once fully. It was almost eleven when he finished his first read through. Once he finished, he decided it was

time to start practicing. He focused on what the book said and turned his gaze inward. The second step to mastering Occlumency was creating a mindscape, somewhere you could organize your thoughts and memories and build defenses around to protect. Concentrating with all his might, Harry used his magic to look inward on his mental plain.

When he opened his eyes, he was standing in the middle of a grassy field, inside his own mind. It was beautiful, perfect, exactly what he book described. Except... he could see ruination in one of the corners. Curious, he walked closer. And suddenly a desolate, burned out castle came into view. As he approached, he felt a dark presence wash over him. It was trying to influence him, to take control, and Harry fell to his knees. Scared, he dissolved the connection with his mindscape.

He awoke on his bed, breathing rapidly. What the hell was that? The book never mentioned anything about dark presences. He eventually calmed down and decided to ask Mr. Ollivander tomorrow. He tried to fall asleep, but the uneasy feeling the castle gave him remained. He eventually fell into an uneasy sleep, images of the castle haunting his dreams.

Harry arrived early in the shop the next day. He had an uneasy nights rest, and he needed to get the castle squared away if he was going to mater Occlumency. He walked into the shop and waited. Soon, Ollivander was in front of him.

"Ah, excellent Harry, you're here early. How did creating mind defenses and organizing your mind go?" he asked.

"It didn't." Harry watched Ollivander's eyebrows rise. He launched into a description of going to his mindscape and encountering the burned-out castle emulating a dark aura. When he finished, Ollivander stood silently thinking for several minutes.

"The fact that there is another presence in your mind is very disturbing." He stood and contemplated. He turned to Harry. "How thorough an exam did the healer give you in St. Mungo's?"

Harry recounted his healer exam in detail. When he finished, Ollivander began pacing. Finally he stopped. He took a breath.

"Alright Harry, return to your mindscape and I will use legilimency to try and get a read on this anomaly."

Harry once again focused inward and within a few minutes was back in the mindscape, standing in the middle of the empty field. He saw the castle ruins and began walking to them, feeling Ollivander's presence with him. Finally he stopped as he began to feel the castle try and call to him. A wave of darkness washed over him, screaming out for him. When Ollivander finally exited his mind, Harry broke the connection. Once he returned to full consciousness and awareness, Harry realizing Ollivander was shaking.

"Mr. Ollivander? Mr. Ollivander; what's wrong?" Harry asked worriedly.

Mr. Ollivander took a breath, his silvery eyes boring into Harry's. "That presence in your mind I have felt one other time. I remember it from when he came to buy his first wand; the one that is the brother to yours."

Harry felt like he'd been slapped. "Was that Voldemort?" Harry asked, truly afraid of the answer.

Ollivander nodded and Harry sank to the ground. "I suspect Mr. Potter, that a piece of his soul is embedded in your body." Silence met this pronouncement. "When you murder, and I mean commit cold blooded murder, it tears the soul asunder. I suspect that when the killing curse he casted at you reflected back at him, part of his soul broke off and became intertwined with your own."

Silence; there was absolute silence. A minute, two minutes, five minutes, and finally ten minutes before the silence broke. "Well, what can we do about this? I mean, I don't want him in MY BLOODY MIND!" Harry asked in a shaking voice that eventually ended with him shouting.

Mr. Ollivander appeared to be already mulling over an answer. "First of all, this is alarming proof that Voldemort still walks among us, that he is biding his time, trying to return to power." He thought for a minute. "We can't snap this connection between you and him, Mr. Potter. There is too much chance it would drive you insane. I suspect that no matter what we do, some form of connection between you two will remain in place. But," he seemed to be tossing

around an idea, "I wonder." He summoned over a book. Harry caught one word on the cover; Exorcism.

Ollivander read for a few minutes while Harry held his breath. "Ah, here it is. This is a ritual done back in America in the 1870's. A woman gave birth to twins; a boy and a girl. The boy died in childhood but his presence remained in the girl and he would routinely possess her. This ritual was used to remove the magical power from the boy's presence in the girl's mind. Yes, here is our answer." Ollivander grabbed his cloak. "Please stay here and watch my shop Harry. I should be back in twenty minutes."

Twenty minutes later, Ollivander returned carrying several packages. "Come with me into the back room, Harry." Harry followed Harry into his back room. He noticed immediately that the room was empty and there were several sets of connecting doorways leading from the room to other parts of the shop. "All right, here is what we are going to do. I will prepare the ritual by marking down the correct runes. Then I will get the ingredients and mix them into the correct solution. Afterwards, you will sit in the middle of the runic carvings and enter your mindscape, while I chant the correct words to activate the effect we need." He took a breath. "What this ritual will do, Harry, is remove your connection to the soul fragment. It is like a leech, siphoning off your power. There is still going to be a connection, but it will only be powered externally. Meaning you won't be feeding Voldemort power anymore. However, it is possible that in states of emotional intensity, you both might be able to enter the other's mind due to your connection. I can't snap it now, only weaken it. Are you ready?"

Harry nodded and watched Ollivander draw varied runic figures and mixed ingredients and poured the mixtures around the runes. Finally, he signaled to Harry to sit in the middle of the runic mixture. As Ollivander started chanting, Harry returned to his mindscape.

He was standing in the middle of the field once again. He headed towards the castle. Once in range, he felt the dark presence wash over him. But soon, this was joined by a new presence; the ritual. And then a figure came into view; Lord Voldemort. His face snakelike, the nose non-existent- merely a slit; his eyes red and bloodthirsty, and staring at Harry with a hungry look. It was truly a fearsome sight.

"Harry Potter," he began in a deathly quiet whisper. "What a surprise it is for me to meet you here of all places. How does it feel Harry? To know that I've been in your mind; that your thoughts and feelings aren't safe. How does it feel, to know that even though the entire world thinks you succeeded in defeating me, you really failed? Does it depress you to know that you can never defeat me; even here in your own mind?" Voldemort dissolved into a black cloud, which swarmed onto Harry, burning him as it began covering him.

Harry reacted instinctively, the ritual guiding his movements, he summoned his magic, there was a blinding flash of white light, and Harry knew no more. His final thoughts of consciousness were that he hoped he at least took Voldemort with him.

Chapter Three: Reestablishment

Harry awoke to a burning pain in his forehead and Mr. Ollivander standing over him. Once he saw Harry was awake, he smiled.

"Welcome back, Mr. Potter." Ollivander said; the relief was clear in his voice.

"What happened? How long was I out?" Harry croaked in succession.

Ollivander chuckled, a good sign if there was one, Harry hoped. "I underestimated the power of the ritual. I was correct that you would remove the power leech the soul fragment exhibited on you. However, what I didn't know is that the magical aspect of the soul would be absorbed into your own core." He saw Harry's look of confusion. "I see it's lesson time."

"There are, as you know, many theories about magic; how we use it, what determines our ability to use it, and so on. The one I believe is that there is a magical core in every person which provides the magic that flows through our bodies. This core, in my belief, determines magical traits, power level, and generally the ability to wield magic. There are also magical pathways throughout the body that allow the passage and use of magical, but that is for another time. Anyway, the soul is magically infused. When Voldemort cast the curse, I believe any and all magic he had at that time dissipated and split itself between the spectral form of Voldemort and the soul fragmentff in you. So, in theory, that soul fragment held half of Voldemort's power. However, I should have read the ritual more thoroughly. The magical power of the soul can't just disappear. Logically, it has to go somewhere. And when the ritual was completed, it merged with you." He saw Harry's shocked look. "Your core was the only available location the magic could go to. And so I believe your core has assimilated Voldemort's magic. You were already extremely powerful to begin with; but now, at the age of eleven, with enough knowledge, I believe you could overpower an auror such as the legendary Mad-Eye Moody. I mean, you were already powerful and much of that power was being leeched by the soul fragment. Consider that, most of your magic generated was fed to Voldemort. But now, there is no longer that drain on your power, in addition to even more magic. And, of course, with practice and time, you will only grow even more powerful. I believe that you will

become one of the most powerful wizards in our history!" Ollivander finished excitedly.

Harry just stared at him, and Ollivander eventually calmed down. "Now then, the connection is for the most part severed. But, as I said, in extreme emotional states, it is possible for either of you to enter the others mind. The ritual merely stopped the power leech and the magical absorption was an unexpected benefit. But there is still is a small backdoor that exists between both of your minds. Be careful." He cleared his throat. "Another thing of importance is that as we practice Occlumency, I believe you will come across memories not your own. I suspect many of Voldemort's memories were destroyed by the ritual, but some will remain. Most likely those memories remain with which Voldemort most associated with power. One other item of interest is that some of Voldemort's traits- both magical and personality wise- have probably been absorbed. For example, I believe you can freely speak parseltongue now, whereas before you could only do it in the presence of a snake and by surrendering some control to the soul fragment. Finally, with the removal of the soul fragment, Occlumency should become much easier for you. It impresses me to no end that you were able to maintain control when you had double the number of thoughts, feelings, and emotions in your head." He was about to turn and walk away when he stopped. "Oh, and in answer to your final question, you have been unconscious for six hours. It is now five."

Harry gingerly rose to his feet and headed to the front of the shop. He had to keep stretching; his body felt warn and ragged and a shower would be perfect right about now. Ollivander gestured to a chair.

After Harry sat down, he began talking again. "Now that you are free from outside influences, we shall commence Occlumency. Go into your mind, sort through your memories, and after everything is organized begin building defenses. I will be here if you need me."

So Harry once again entered his mindscape. The only difference was that this time there were no burnt-out castles and no evil Dark Lords residing in his head. There was a locked doorway dark magic emanated from, but Harry decided to secure and trap it and build his mental fortress away from it. He found the perfect spot and decided to start by organizing his memories. He wanted them to appear in front of him and they did, scattering like a million pieces of paper in

the wind. Harry conjured file cabinets to put the papers in and began sorting through his memories. He created folders like primary school, The Dursleys, The Magical World, Ollivander, and so on. He quickly noticed that the paper/memories that were his were all white, while any that had remained from Voldemort were blood red. So he made sure to organize his own thoughts and memories before creating file cabinets for Voldemort's memories. The problem was that when he touched a piece of paper/memory, he relived it. So he was careful to not touch them, and to that end, he conjured a paper grabber to use. It took a lot of time before he finally organized all of Voldemort's memories based on the few seconds he watched them. But time was immaterial here. And with his filing system in place and his mind organized, Harry decided it was time to create some security. So he created a locked room and willed it so only he could enter. Then he created a hallway and another room, this one where he would keep his emotions. And so he created aspects of his personality and emotions; happiness, fear, altruism, paranoia, cleverness, cunning, and so on; as many aspects as he could think of. Each of these various aspects looked like him except for features distinguishing the aspect of his personality. Happiness, for example, had a smile on his face. Optimism was trying to keep the other aspects spirits up. Cleverness and Intelligence had their noses in books. Paranoia was in the corner of the room with a knife in hand watching everyone else warily. And after he finished creating all of these personality aspects, he locked that room up as well. And so he set about creating the house, with false rooms to rummage through to protect his important memories, and rooms dedicated to things his mind needed to do, like concentrate, create ideas, and maintain control. He also hit upon the idea, since Ollivander had impressed on him magic being willpower and intent, of creating a room where he could direct magic, like a command center. When he was finished creating the house, he put up routine defenses such as machine-gun turrets and guards patrolling the hall. He also made sure to put traps around the doorway between his and Voldemort's mind. Finally, he exited his mind and regained consciousness.

The first thing he did once he was conscious was cast the tempus charm to see that it was eight-thirty. Ollivander came over and told him he should go get some sleep. Harry took his advice to heart after wolfing down a meal at the Cauldron and getting a much needed shower. He finally fell into bed, completely exhausted, at ten.

Harry woke up completely refreshed. A quick tempus charm told him it was ten. He slept for twelve hours! He quickly got dressed, breakfasted, and was in Ollivander's at eleven. He walked in, and was treated to the familiar sight of the old man smiling mysteriously at him. Damn, Ollivander was becoming a familiar sight.

"It is good to see you looking refreshed, Mr. Potter. Today we'll continue with Occlumency. One of the last coherent ideas you communicated to me yesterday was that you'd finished organizing your mind and defenses. So today, I'll use legilimency to try and enter your thoughts and memories." And so they practiced. Ollivander continually found ways to invade his mind and gave Harry tips to strengthen his defences, which included that he needed more magical effects. Finally, after six long hours of work, Ollivander was unable to break into his mind.

They both exited the mindscape. "Mr. Potter, you have done it. Using my suggestions, I believe you are capable of resisting a legilimency attack. Of course, you'll need to constantly change and strengthen your defenses over time, but I'm confident you can do it." He allowed Harry a few minutes to reflect on his accomplishment and revel in his latest success before he went back to business.

"Now then, you will have to continually practice Occlumency and upgrade your mind's defenses before you master it. But now we shall turn our attention elsewhere." Ollivander paused for effect. "When we were talking earlier I mentioned the three components I believe are involved determining magical strength and control. So now, we turn our attention to the magical pathways. This is extremely important for keeping magical control because these pathways help you put the right amount of power into a spell. There are some spells that can be overpowered and have no negative impact, like a stunner or blasting curse. Many spells and all of transfiguration, however, require a degree of finesse, where you are carefully regulating your body and magical pathways so that just the right amount of magic is put into the spell. And the only real way to gain this control over your magic is to practice. So get out your wand," Harry carefully withdrew his. "Hmm, you need a wand holster. Anyway," He flicked his wand and a wooden dummy appeared. "What I am going to teach you is the disillusionment charm, a charm that requires an exact amount of magic. You must put the exact right amount of magical power, will, and concentration behind the spell for it to succeed. This is why this charm is only taught in the auror

academy." Harry gaped at him. He was learning a charm beyond NEWT level and he hadn't even started Hogwarts? Ollivander saw his shocked look. "There is an attitude in the magical academic world that you need building blocks to perform certain spells. The feeling is that you first must turn a needle into a matchstick before you can turn a tortoise into a teapot. I disagree, however. I believe that magic is all about effort put into learning spells and magical power, concentration, control, and so on are the determining factors for when a student can perform it. But this idea is a direct swipe at the uniformity assumption of the magical world; that every child must remain at the same place knowledge-wise to a certain extent. Oh, they'll let advanced students study in the library or privately ask them questions, but magical educators generally teach to the lowest common denominator."

He cleared his throat. "But as I told you, I believe there are three components with many different factors that determine the ability to cast spells. Concentration and willpower are related to the mind, control and finesse the magical pathways, and power and ability in an area to the magical core. Thus, theoretically, it seems logical that you can learn spells out of order. And this is why you will be practicing the disillusionment charm, a useful charm meant to make you blend into the background and a viable alternative when your family's invisibility cloak is swiped by a meddling old man."

And so Ollivander taught him the incantation and wand movements. And if Harry's first casting of the spell was any indication, it was going to be an adventure. He melted the dummy he was practicing on until only splinters remained. And so Ollivander kept re-conjuring the dummy while Harry attempted to negotiate, command, curse, and generally try and will his magic to respond to his intention of making the dummy blend in with the background. With the result that by dinnertime, he'd melted every dummy he'd practiced on. Ollivander eventually stopped him and had him retake his seat. Harry reflected that in between a half dozen attempts or so, he should probably take a few minutes rest to recharge his magic as he sat down.

However, Harry reminisced about how he was treated to the sight of watching Ollivander work. While he was in a corner with the notice-me-not charm still hiding him and practicing the disillusionment charm, at least five families came in for wands. And Ollivander always made sure to mention the full name of the customer at least,

so Harry had a name to file away in his mind. And now he knew five of his year mates. Hermione Granger. Wayne Hopkins. Kevin Entwhistle. Dean Thomas. And most interesting of all, the Greengrass family. Harry remembered watching the two younger sisters, Daphne and Astoria, and their parents enter the shop. The oldest Greengrass sister, Queenie, arrived a few minutes later. From the Potter files, Harry knew the girl the contract would apply to would be Daphne as Queenie was ineligible due to an age clause that said the bride and groom couldn't be separated by more than three years of age. And Queenie was fifteen; just going into her fifth year. So fthat meant Daphne was the one the contract would apply to.

Harry did make sure to remember how she and her family looked. The entire family had charcoal black hair and aristocratic faces with varying baby-blue and night-black eyes. Daphne in particular looked like she could one day be a model. And Ollivander decided to be ironic by turning the conversation to what the family thought about Harry Potter's reentrance into their world. And this was where Harry got treated to a fifteen minute soliloquy about how the boy-who-lived was an unknown quantity and that there wasn't even really evidence he'd done anything to defeat the Dark Lord and why should he be treated as such a hero anyway. And as they left and Harry got back to work, he had to remind himself that some people in the wizarding world just begged to be cursed; but you didn't necessarily have to do the cursing. Ollivander cleared his throat to draw back Harry's attention.

"You are doing well Harry. Within a week you should have your magic firmly under control. Now then, I wanted to talk about a few plans and things that I believe we should do while you are here." Ollivander was silent for a moment before he continued. "The first thing you should know is that I, as I promised, have been acquiring books to fill out your collection. I was wrong and underestimated how much time it would take to create a comprehensive library, and I can tell you it should be done on the ninth of August; the same day you will receive your trunk and other things." He was silent for a moment. "The second thing is that I believe you need a solicitor on retainer. With Dumbledore and many acquitted Death Eaters like Lucius Malfoy out there and taking too great an interest in you, a solicitor can begin litigation on your behalf to protect you from any courtroom shenanigans they try to pull. I will have a list for you tomorrow of solicitors who have good records and recommendations. This also brings me to the topic of your two seats in the Wizengamot,

the British Wizarding world's equivalent to Parliament. The law states that even as an emancipated minor, you still can't assume the seats until you're fifteen. This means you need to appoint a representative, someone to vote in your interests. I will have a list for you tomorrow as well." He saw Harry's questioning look. "We'll also talk about how the wizarding world is governed, but we'll hold off until tomorrow for that conversation." And then Ollivander changed topics. "I remember that when you were here getting your wand, you had a snowy white owl with you. Do you still have her?"

"Yes. I named her Hedwig just last night." Harry replied.

"There is an aspect to magic that revolves around animals. Why the animagus transformation," he saw Harry's look of confusion and rerouted his explanation. "The animagus transformation is when a wizard uses ritualistic methods coupled with transfiguration and a vision inducing potion in order to transform into an animal. The difference between being transfigured into an animal and becoming an animagus is that the animagus keeps their mind for the most part, while a transfigured animal acts out of that animal's instincts."

"That sounds really cool." Harry interrupted.

"It is. It is also considered beyond NEWT work, something you do only if you want mastery. I was going to get the vision potion for you. The vision potion shows you any and all animals you can transform into. However, you only see a vision of an animal at a certain age. Also, we will need to check in periodically to see if any new animals appear to you. The potion should be here in two days. If you see an animal, we'll see what we can do about making you into an animagus. Now then, the reason I was asking about animals, and in particular your owl, is because of familiars." He saw Harry with a look of confusion on his face he was getting used to. "A familiar is an animal that a wizard or witch has a bond with. What I mean by that is that the animal in question answers only to that magic user and is in fact infused with its master's magic. This is useful because the magic user is then infused with some of the animal's magic. For example, having a cat as a familiar means faster reflexes and a stronger affinity to cutting curses; cats claws. An owl familiar, like you may have, grants its master wisdom and vision. Hence, make Hedwig your familiar and you will have perfect vision. It won't be instantaneous, of course, the magic takes time to transfer. But those potions you take only give you vision without glasses. An owl will grant you perfect, or near perfect, vision, as well as a kind of night

vision which they routinely use to hunt." He watched Harry contemplate the prospect of a familiar. "When you go back to the Cauldron tonight, look directly into your owl's eyes and try to communicate with her. You will know what to do once you've achieved this step."

And with that vague instruction, Harry left Ollivander's and headed back to the cauldron. He wolfed down dinner, chatted with Tom, and then retired to his room. Once there, he opened a book and waited for Hedwig to return from hunting; she was out now. An hour or so later, Hedwig arrived back, a mouse in her beak. Harry walked over to the owl, kneeled to eye level, and stared directly into her eyes.

Hedwig? Harry concentrated on the word and to his surprise, he received an immediate response.

Magic User Harry? The voice asked back in his head. Harry was completely startled. And suddenly, he was in his mindscape with a snowy owl perched on his shoulder. "Hedwig, what are you doing here?"

"Calm, Harry, I am here in your mind. I am your familiar, after all." She preened a bit at this statement.

"So I know Ollivander told me about a bond but what does it mean?" Harry asked, deciding if Hedwig could speak to him here he could speak to her as well.

"What this bond means is that I have pledged my loyalty to you. There is magic connecting us and using this magic we can communicate from a large distance, and share abilities like the night-vision ability I have. In short, we infuse each other with magic. You will be a little stronger, faster, and have a little more control while the same benefits apply to me." Hedwig explained.

"Oh, and out of curiosity, the wisdom thing?" Harry asked, remembering his conversation with Ollivander.

"Owls are considered wise creatures, so I suppose you'll see an increase in brainpower and brain processes. Now to finalize the familiar bond, here's what you do..." Hedwig explained.

Harry followed Hedwig's instructions to the letter and soon he exited his mindscape. Once he returned to consciousness, he immediately felt Hedwig's presence in his mind. "Get off the floor, Harry," Hedwig scolded him in his head. Harry spent the night chatting with Hedwig, who was very chatty now that she found a companion to talk with, and soon he fell asleep.

"GET UP LAZYBONES!" A voice screamed in his head. Harry yelped and scrambled out of his bed only to be treated to his familiar's laughter.

"Owl's a bloody menace to society," he muttered, checking the time and seeing it was just after ten. A quick shower and breakfast and before he knew it he was inside Ollivander's store.

"Good day Harry." Said Ollivander as he conjured a chair and sat down. He motioned for Harry to take a seat as well. "Now then, before we get to practicing, I promised you several explanations. Where would you like to start?"

Harry mentally reviewed what they had talked out before he said, "I want you to explain about the Wizengamot and the wizarding world's government."

"This will take some time Mr. Potter." Ollivander was silent for a moment. "The Wizengamot is both the court and parliament of British magical society. There are fifty members of the Wizengamot. A seat on the Wizengamot is hereditary. When you turn fifteen you will find yourself in control of two seats on the Wizengamot; the Potter and Black seats. Naturally, because the seats are hereditary, only pureblood interests are really represented. Any law that is proposed must be voted on by the Wizengamot after a certain amount of deliberation and detailing of the specifics. In the event of a tie on legislation, the Minister of Magic can step in and cast the deciding vote. This brings us to the Minister's function in our government. The minister presides over all departments and policies of the ministry. Any major reform he wishes to exercise over a department must be voted on by the Wizengamot. But the minister has the power to set the budget, replace people, and set policy. For instance, the minister can amend the situational guideline the Department of Magical Accidents and Catastrophes, stating which situations where their presence is necessary. He can, for instance, state that the appearance of the kelpie in Loch Ness is a situation

the department must get involved in containing. However, he can't amend procedures, to state how to resolve the situation, without a Wizengamot vote. The ministerial election is held every five years, and the last one was in October of 1990. The minister gets elected by having a majority of Wizengamot seats support him. So, in the next ministerial election, you will be a crucial endorsement for any candidate, especially since you will have two seats to your name. Anyway, the various departments in the ministry oversee the various aspects of a wizard's life. For example the Department of Magical Transportation, which oversees the four ways wizards travel; floo, apparition, broomstick, and portkey." He saw Harry's look and decided to explain about that before resuming talk of the government. "The floo system uses any magical fireplace and an activation key of floo powder to help wizards transport from place to place. Apparition, the hardest method, involves using magic to disappear and almost instantly reappear in another place. Portkeys are items that look normal, everyday muggle items, but are enchanted to transport a wizard from location A to location B. Finally broomsticks are used for flying and that can get a wizard from place to place."

Ollivander was silent for a moment. "Anyway, as I was saying, the various departments oversee aspects of the everyday wizard's life. Now overall, the government is incompetent. It happens when all your members represent only one denomination of the population they serve, and have their seats for life. There is no separation of power, and all the members generally have their own agenda and don't particularly care about what's good for the wizarding world. Thus, there is incompetence, corruption, stagnation, and general maliciousness. I tell you all this," he said gazing at Harry, "To put you on your guard, and to warn you to game the system now while you're extremely popular."

He saw Harry's look of doubt and disbelief. "Don't look at me like that; I'm not being cynical. I'm a cynical man in general, but this time I'm not exaggerating. The ministry is that bad, that completely corrupt. When the chips are down, these...these "civilized people" they'll eat you whole. You must be vigilant, and that vigilance includes striking when you have an advantage. You have the reputation as the Boy-Who-Lived, savior of our world, recently returned in triumph from isolation with the muggles. Use it. One way it could be used is this: many magical arts, like Legilimency, are considered illegal to practice without a permit. Many potions are

restricted. Now's the perfect time for you to get that permit so you can practice whatever magical arts and brew whatever potions without being penalized, which might happen if a politician needed to destroy your credibility. You can go to the DMLE and get a license for doing those things. Apparition also requires a license. After I teach you how to do it, and I will just in case you have to apparate in an emergency, get a permit or maybe even get it beforehand. Make it so that they can't hit you where it hurts just because they feel like it. And they might, if push comes to shove, and you seem to be an obstacle to one of these "Lord's" agendas." He saw Harry's skeptical look. "All right, what happens if and when Voldemort returns to power? What if you were the only witness? The ministry would just try and drag your name through the mud rather than acknowledge he might be back. You need security. And someday soon, I'll close up the shop and we'll go to the ministry and get what you need. Now then, I'm aware I owe you a few more explanations."

Ollivander stopped and looked at Harry. "Oh, um, can you explain about the various fields of magic? You've mentioned it several times."

Ollivander chuckled. "What you must realize, Mr. Potter, is that there is much magic that is unknown. That said, I will try to answer your question as best I can. The traditional fields of magical study, the ones Hogwarts teaches, are defense against the dark arts, transfiguration, charms, potions, herbology, astronomy, history of magic, divination, arithmancy, ancient runes, divination, care of magical creature, and muggle studies. However, there are many fields of magic not covered by Hogwarts. For example, Hogwarts may have a course in defense against the dark arts, but they provide no instruction in dueling. There used to be a dueling club at Hogwarts, but it disbanded in the early seventies, when it went beyond fun or learning and became about crippling your opponent." He looked off in the distance wistfully as if remembering something, before snapping his attention back to Harry. "Now then, areas of magic Hogwarts doesn't study include warding, spell creation and modification, wandless magic, ritual magic, magic relating to familiars, alchemy, healing magic, parseltongue, the nature of magic, wand crafting, enchanting, the mind arts, battle magic, blood magic, soul magic, necromancy, elemental magic, and dark magic or dark arts (not that I blame them for that one). Though there are all of these defined fields of magic, there is a large amount of magic in the unknown category."

Harry had paid special attention when Ollivander recited the subjects taught at Hogwarts. "Who teaches what class at Hogwarts?" Harry piped in.

"Minerva McGonagall teaches transfiguration, Aurora Sinistra teaches Astronomy, Filius Flitwick teaches charms, Severus Snape teaches potions, Sybil Trelawney teaches Divination, Pomona Sprout teaches Herbology, Cuthbert Binn's ghost teaches history of magic, Ralph Kettleburn teaches care of magical creatures, Septima Vector teaches arithmancy, Charity Burbage teaches muggle studies, and the defense against the dark arts position supposedly has a curse on it, so the teacher this year will be Quirinius Quirell, and for some reason or another you'll have a new teacher next year." Ollivander answered.

Harry involuntarily shuddered when he mentioned Quirell. The man's stutter was rather annoying. The shudder reminded Harry of something he'd run across. "The prison Azkaban has been mentioned several times, always with shudders and looks of fear. What's so terrible about it?" Harry asked.

Ollivander involuntarily shuddered as well. "Azkaban is a prison on an island to the north, cut off from the land by the surrounding sea. What makes the prison so horrible are the guards; the dementors. Dementors are magical creatures, tall and draped in black cloaks always hiding their faces, who feed, for all intents and purposes, off wizards and witch's positive emotions. They spread cold and frost in their wake, and they drain every happy emotion and memory in you leaving you with your worst experiences. Stay in their presence too long, and you will go mad."

Harry shuddered and decided to change the subject, and Ollivander's long list of different branches of magic seemed like a good choice. "You mentioned ritual magic; what is it exactly? I mean, is it like what we did yesterday to remove Voldemort from my mind?"

"No, Harry. Ritual magic, for all intents and purposes, is combining a series of effects and items together to grant a benefit, at a cost of those items, and pain. For example, a few runes combined with Re'em blood and oak tree bark can strengthen the bones, and leave a person with temporary horrid pain in the same area. I suppose we will dabble in it a bit, but that will be later." Ollivander checked the

time. "Now then, that's enough explanations for now. Start practicing the disillusionment charm again."

And so Ollivander conjured the dummy and Harry spent the entire day either melting it or having no effect on it. After hours of work Ollivander told him to stop and take a seat.

"The reason for doing the disillusionment charm is that it is a charm that requires a lot of power, strengthening your magic, and it requires a level of finesse." He explained. "Think of it like an equation. $2+2$ can only equal four, not 3.98 or 4.03 . You need to get your magic to exactly four. However, you also have to factor in wand movements and willpower, which makes it more like $1.33 + 1.33 + 1.34 = 4$. Now then, you'll try again tomorrow, and tomorrow you'll also have the animagus vision potion. You probably won't see an animal, but if you do, we can try and schedule training. The animagus transformation also requires a degree of finesse it would be good for you to obtain, though the difficulty of mastering such a complex piece of magic should be obvious." He was about to dismiss Harry when he thought better of it. "One last thing I want you to do. Those memories you have from Voldemort. Go through them and see what they're about. Knowledge is power, after all, and knowing your enemy can only help you later in life. Good day, Harry."

Another typical evening and Harry was back in his room, preparing for bed. Before falling asleep, he decided to look through Voldemort's memories. What he saw shocked him.

The first clump of memories he went through dealt with a young Tom Riddle at the orphanage being bullied. Finally, enough was enough and he began using his magic to retaliate, first by killing a boy's rabbit, then torturing two kids who'd picked on him. He became progressively worse, transitioning from self-defense to extortion of toys from the other orphans. Then there was a meeting with Albus Dumbledore where he was told about Hogwarts and introduced to the magical world. Then the memories derailed, apparently destroyed. Harry picked up the memories again as Tom learned about magic and the war with Grindelfwald escalated around him. There were several introspective memories where Tom reflected on various schools of magic and how to better perform in them, all around Riddle's middle teen years. The memories skipped ahead, the intermittent ones apparently destroyed, to his graduation

and getting a job at Borgin and Burkes, hoping to find treasured artifacts of the founders, though Harry had no clue why. Another jump, this time to Tom learning advanced magic; parselmagic, wandless magic, blood magic, and the dark arts, all of these memories occurring between his 20's and 30's. Another jump, this time revealing where he kept a cache of information on personal research, though Harry had no way to obtain it; it was gone now. And the final remaining memories were bits and pieces from duels. Many of the duels featured famous figures like Alastor Moody, Fabian and Gideon Prewitt, Frank and Alice Longbottom, and –his parents. That was it, his memories ended there.

Harry had a hard time falling asleep that night, the images of Voldemort flinging curses at his parents still in his mind. His dreams, when he eventually fell asleep, replayed the memories as well.

It was a very grouchy Harry that walked into Ollivander's the next day. Ollivander immediately noticed his disposition and beckoned Harry to sit.

Once seated, Ollivander asked the million dollar question. "Well, what happened?"

"I did as you advised and looked through the memories," Harry snapped.

"And? What did you see?" Ollivander prompted.

"Some were his childhood, you were right- it sucked, some were him learning and theorizing about magic, and some were him dueling; Alastor Moody, Fabian and Gideon Prewitt, Alice and Frank Longbottom." Harry answered tersely.

"And your parents," Ollivander added.

Harry stared at him. "Yes," he finally muttered, looking away.

Ollivander sighed. "Harry, I could never truly understand how you must be feeling, watching your parents duel one of the most evil wizards in history, and worse, watching it from his point-of-view. I know how you must be feeling: depressed- watching a madman try and kill your parents, angry- at him for cursing them and at me for asking you to view these memories, and again, depressed from the

violence and pointless killing you had to witness. But what you have to realize is that you needed to see those memories, to see what he was truly capable of, to know what he could do. It's not easy; it was never supposed to be."

He sat in silence, letting Harry chew over his words. When he finally looked up, Ollivander handed him a potion bottle.

"This is the animagus vision potion. Drink it now; maybe you'll see an animal," said Ollivander.

Harry knew he was just trying to distract him, but uncapped the bottle and drank it down anyway. Quickly, the world around him began spinning and blurring, and he fell into a deep sleep.

He was in a forest, the dense trees fluttered around him in the breeze, sitting on a tree branch. Looking around, he heard the woodland creatures in symphony as he noticed just how tranquil the forest was. Sensing something he took flight... took flight? Getting a look at his body, he saw he was a bird, it looked like a..."

And Harry awoke. He noticed he was in a bed in Ollivander's backroom. Within seconds Ollivander appeared next to him.

"Well," he eagerly pressed. "What did you see?"

"I had an animagus form," said Harry excitedly. "I was in a forest observing my surrounding when I decided to take flight. I finally noticed that I had the body of a bird, and I think I was a raven."

"Excellent. After you finish the disillusionment charm, we'll try out the transformation. I should warn you that the transformation requires even more finesse than the charm you're working on," Said Ollivander.

And so Harry spent another day trying out the charm. It was hard work, continuously channeling his magic to try and achieve the desired result. It took a lot out of him. Ollivander told him that when he felt tired, he should sit down and rest for fifteen to twenty minutes, and start again. After hours of working on it, he finally managed to make the dummy blend into the background.

"Mr. Ollivander, I think I did it." Harry cried excitedly as Ollivander came over to inspect his work.

After a few minutes of examination, he nodded to Harry. "Yes, you finally got that charm working. But getting a charm working once isn't enough. You must get a feel for your magic; know the exact right amount to put in. It isn't enough to have performed the charm once; you need to master it. Now, begin practicing again. Until you have done the charm successfully ten times in a row, and the dummy blends in perfectly with the background, you aren't done."

And so Harry began practicing again. Now that he got it working once, he was having a lot more success with the charm. He could feel the magic flow through him, and using that, it became much easier to cast the charm. By the end of the day he had a streak of five times in a row. Finally Ollivander signaled that was enough and Harry took a seat for his parting words.

"As I mentioned to you two days ago, here are candidates for being your solicitor and Wizengamot representative." He handed a folder to Harry. "Go through them over the next few days. Tomorrow, I will be closing my shop and directing wand seekers to go to a competitor. I have quite a few topics we need to touch on, and then we are going to the ministry. I will show you around the various departments, help you make introductions, and hopefully we can get you some of the permits I talked about. Good night, Mr. Potter."

Harry walked into Ollivander's with his best looking clothes on. Mr. Ollivander looked at him appraisingly before nodding and walking into the backroom. He and Harry quickly used the floo to get to the ministry atrium. Harry stumbled out, but no one noticed and Ollivander began his tour.

"This is the atrium of the Ministry of Magic, where the employees and visitors enter." He led Harry over to a wizard who checked his wand and then handed it back. The bored wizard never realized who Harry was. Once they walked on, he continued, "There is the fountain of magical brethren, something that in reality will probably never happen," he said, pointing to the fountain depicting a wizard, witch, centaur, goblin, and house-elf that even Harry could tell were in very unlikely positions; the centaur and the goblin that is. They walked to the elevator. "The two floors above have the Department of Mysteries and the Wizengamot courtrooms. The Department of

Mysteries is where we are bound for first." They rode the elevator in silence until they reached their destination.

Harry silently followed Ollivander through the halls of the Department. Five minutes later, they were both sitting silently in a sparsely decorated room that held only a table stacked with magazines and a bunch of wooden chairs dispersed around the carpeted room. A figure draped in a black cloak with a hood obscuring his face entered the room.

"Emanuel Ollivander escorting Lord Harold James Potter?" asked the figure in a distorted voice.

Ollivander stood up. "Yes, I am Emanuel Ollivander, the advisor to Harry Potter, and he is the very same person," he said beckoning to Harry.

The cloaked guide bowed. "If you will follow me please?" he asked as Harry and Ollivander stood and began to follow. They were led through dark, winding corridors with no indication of where they were headed. Finally they were led into a small office with two comfortable chairs arranged for them, and another Unspeakable behind a desk.

"Mr. Ollivander and Mr. Potter for you, sir," said the Unspeakable guide as he left the room. The Unspeakable shuffled some papers on his desk before turning to them.

"So, Emanuel, it's a pleasure to see you again, and you as well, Mr. Potter. What can I do for you today?" He asked, his voice distorted just like their guide.

"Cut the act, Nick. How have you been?" Ollivander said with a smile.

The Unspeakable removed his hood to show an old man with short silvery grey hair and a weathered face with charcoal black eyes, though he had a grin plastered on his face. "I've been excellent, Emanuel." His voice was no longer distorted by the hood; it was now heavy and gravely.

Ollivander turned to Harry. "This is my good friend Nicolas Flamel, aged alchemist and head of the Unspeakables." He turned to Nicholas. "And this is Harry Potter."

Ollivander had made sure Harry knew that name beforehand. Nicolas Flamel, the great alchemist, considered one of the most powerful wizards in history. He even looked the part. His grey silvery hair was parted neatly down the middle and he looked strong and robust, like he'd just come from a workout, despite being in Unspeakable attire. He didn't look a day over sixty.

Nicolas held out a steady hand for Harry to shake. "Hello, Harry Potter. I must say it is an honor to meet you. Welcome back to the wizarding world." Harry shook the old man's hand; he noted the strong grip.

"The reason we are here today, Nicolas, is because Harry here needs an introduction to the ministry. He has recently taken me on as his advisor. So here we are, asking you for the ins and outs of the ministry, and for the 'workarounds,' a young lord might need" said Ollivander.

Flamel frowned. "Surely you aren't asking me to help you circumvent the law?" he asked incredulously.

"NO, no- that's not what I want, Nicolas," He gestured to Harry. "The problem facing Harry here is that soon he will be learning advanced magics far beyond a normal education. With him being the Boy-Who-Lived and all, if he doesn't have the proper certification, it might very well blow up in his face. And there are many things he could use. Harry has agreed to let me handle this, while you send someone to escort him to a very interesting prophecy." He gave Nicolas a significant look. Flamel sighed as he reapplied his hood and pressed a button on a magical device on his desk.

Within seconds, another shrouded Unspeakable made their way into the room. "You called me, sir."

Nicolas Flamel's voice was distorted again. "Take Mr. Potter down to the hall of prophecy and give him a private viewing of the one by S.P.T. to Albus Dumbledore."

The Unspeakable bowed. "Right away, sir." He beckoned Harry to follow him.

He led Harry through another set of dark, winding corridors. They arrived in a room with several doors, and it began revolving. After it spun for a bit, it stopped and the Unspeakable opened a door for both of them and proceeded through. He led Harry through a room with what looked like experiments in time, but they walked through before Harry could ask. Finally, they arrived in a dark room with many shelves and various orbs lining the shelves.

Harry followed him down rows before they stopped at what the sign informed him was row 97. The Unspeakable pointed at an orb marked:

S.P.T to A.P.W.B.D.

Dark Lord

And (?)Harry Potter

Harry, following his lead, closed his hand around the orb and lifted it from the shelf. The Unspeakable beckoned for Harry to follow him again, and they set off back the way they came. Soon, they arrived outside an ornate silver door. The Unspeakable opened it, and gestured for Harry to go inside. Harry stepped in and the Unspeakable told him to place the orb on the table before he pulled the door closed.

Harry walked over to what looked like an ordinary wooden dining table in the center of the room, and rested the orb upon it. Instantly, the fog in the orb cleared, and an older woman with insect-like spectacles emerged. She began to speak in a very deep voice.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches....born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not....and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives....the one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Harry felt his heart stop. What the hell was this? This was a... a prophecy? About him! Him defeating Voldemort! Harry began going over the wording. His parents had escaped from Voldemort three times; he saw it in Voldemort's memories. "Born as the Seventh month dies?" He was born July 31st, last day of the seventh month. "Mark him as an equal. "This is alarming proof that Voldemort still walks among us." Ollivander had told him. He instinctively touched the scar- a mark. A mark that made him the "equal" of Voldemort! "Power he knew not?" What on earth was that! "Neither can live while the other survives?" Would that mean... they had to kill each other? Was he destined to be a murderer? It seemed so simple, talking about killing vile murderers in Ollivander's shop. But now, to know that he had to be the one to put down a monster he only recently discovered wasn't dead... words failed him. Harry staggered backwards. He needed to get away, he needed to-

"Calm yourself, Harry," a stern voice commanded. Harry looked around wildly for its source. Ollivander was there; Flamel as well. They stood right inside the doorway watching him intently. Harry's first thought was to draw his wand and try and duel his way past them. Then he realized he knew no spells he could use in a duel. Flamel walked over and pulled Harry to his feet.

Flamel chuckled and spoke. "It was an interesting prophecy, wasn't it?" He saw Harry's resistance. "Have you ever read Oedipus Rex? A king and his wife abandon their son because he is prophesied to kill his father and marry his mother. And what does he do? He kills his father and marries his mother! So if you run away, you will eventually come in contact with Voldemort- you an untrained wizard who left the wizarding world, will fight an evil dark lord with fifty plus years of practice. This prophecy doesn't reveal who will win; just who has a chance to win. In that confrontation, who do you think will win?"

Harry looked over at Ollivander. "I owled Nicolas, who informed me of an outstanding prophecy that involved the Lord I was advising," he explained. "What was I to do- deny you the knowledge on the basis of some misguided notion of protection? You have a right to know; you need to know! What would anyone gain by keeping this knowledge from you! This destiny has been hanging over your head since you were born," His elevated voice calmed down. "You need to prepare for the day when you have to face him, because it is coming. We," he gestured to himself and Nicolas, "have read the

writing on the wall. Voldemort still lives. You are prophesized to face him. You are the only one with a chance of defeating him. Everything else is rather moot. So we, Nicolas and I, have come to an accord." He stopped speaking and turned to Flamel.

Nicolas continued where Ollivander left off. "In light of the fact that you are prophesized to defeat Voldemort, and the potential that Emanuel here claims you are blessed with, I have come to a decision to give you aid in your quest to defeat Voldemort. Now, understand that though you might be destined to fight a continuous battle to the death with Voldemort; you can't put your life on hold. There will always be ever-present threats to your wellbeing; living a normal life in spite of these threats is a testament to an individual's character. That said, there is much you must do if you are going to survive. So here is what I will do to aid you: I will offer you operative status in this department, making you answerable only to me, and essentially outside regular law. This will allow you to receive training and aid at a later date; you are too unskilled for that to do you any good. But after a year or two in Hogwarts, especially with diligent training and practice, you should be ready. I will also make certain to procure items that might aid you; rare texts, useful magical objects, experimental potions- that sort of thing. In addition, the various permits Ollivander mentioned that you will need; I will work to have you all those exemptions by the end of the summer. In this way I, and the Department, will help you towards your destiny of defeating Voldemort. Emanuel."

"Yes Harry, with Nicolas' aid, you have all the more reason to believe you will survive your confrontation with Voldemort. I know how much of a shock it is for the weight of the world to be put on your shoulders; I can only tell you to ignore it, and to prepare for the day when you can't ignore it any longer," Ollivander concluded sadly.

Harry stared at them for a minute; two minutes; five minutes. His world was turned on its side. Not only was Voldemort alive, as he discovered the other day, but Harry was prophesized to defeat him! An unborn child was foretold to be the only one who could possibly defeat the most powerful dark wizard of modern times.

"You're both mental," Harry blurted out finally. He threw off Flamel's hand and backed away. "You can't-are you really expecting- what do you," words failed him. "NO!" he finally shouted. He staggered backwards. "You can't expect ME, to be the one to stop him! I was a

baby when I got lucky the first time! You're putting all your hopes on me- of all the stupid-"

"CALM DOWN!" Ollivander shouted. Harry's mouth snapped shut. Harry, Flamel, and Ollivander stood silently for several minutes, before Ollivander resumed speaking. "Now that you have had a chance to stop panicking, let me advise you." He took a breath; Harry looked on defiantly. "Your defiance will do you no good here. This prophecy will exist, will shadow your every action, until its resolution. You can't nullify, negate, manipulate or twist the terms of the prophecy to get a deferral. Even if you choose to hide away, the prophecy will still mean that fate will ensure you and Voldemort fight. In short, resisting this prophecy is futile."

"I DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR THIS," Harry shouted. "WHY THE HELL AM I BEING FORCED TO FIGHT VOLDEMORT! WHY CAN'T ANYONE ELSE HANDLE THE DIRTY WORK! WHY ME!" He stopped shouting and glared at Ollivander. "You've been manipulating me since the moment I walked into your shop to ask you to be my advisor," he snarled. "You had this all planned out didn't you. I thought you were supposed to be my advisor, not a puppet master who determined my movement with the twist of a string!"

"DO you really think I take satisfaction in telling an eleven year old boy who has yet to start Hogwarts they are destined to fight with, and possibly be killed by, the most powerful dark lord of recent times!" Ollivander bit back bitterly. "You are not thinking rationally, Harry."

He withdrew his wand and conjured three leather chairs facing each other in a triangle. He sat down in the one next to him, while Flamel sat down in one opposite Ollivander. Harry remained standing defiantly in front of his seat. "Please Harry, take a seat. Give me a chance, please." Ollivander pleaded.

His plea won out so Harry took the remaining seat. Ollivander and Flafmel shifted their chairs slightly to face him.

"You are panicked, cursing life for the unfair burden it has laid at your doorstep, along with abusive relatives for the last ten years of your life. It is quite understandable. However, you are lashing out, with your anger and resentment, at people who are trying to help

you; Nicolas and me. I have every reason to wish for you to survive; if I didn't do my best, the magic contract I signed might take my life as penance. Nicolas here has every reason to want Voldemort defeated, for obvious reasons. We both have access to resources that would help strengthen your odds in your eventual fight against Voldemort. You can win Harry; we will do everything to help you. But you have to stop cursing fate for the hand you have been dealt." He stared at Harry. "Please Harry, understand: this isn't a game; a chess match where you are merely a pawn caught between two grandmaster's conflicts. This is your life. A commodity, that, as your advisor, I place a high premium on. We will give you all the aid we can. You won't have to dedicate your entire life to defeating Voldemort. You can still have fun; a normal life. But if you start training now, then hopefully there will come a day in about twenty years or so where you and Voldemort have a final showdown, you defeat him, and you go on with your life. We can't force your actions, only present what we believe is your best course of action. This is your life Harry; we want to make sure you live a happy, long, and prosperous one. Are you willing to work with us, Harry?"

Harry stared at Ollivander. If what Ollivander and Flamel said was true, and their information had certainly been reliable up to this point, then he was going to have to face Voldemort anyway. If so, then their aid could be invaluable. But oh how he regretted the necessity of his decision. It was in this moment that he reflected on the simplicity of life on Privet Drive. How that prison presented a certain kind of freedom his actual newfound freedom lacked; the freedom from decision. He was trapped; no matter what, he would someday have a faceoff with the Dark Lord. Rejecting his fate wouldn't do any good. There was only one thing to do...

"So what do we have to do to ensure I will survive my eventual fight with Voldemort, gentlemen?" Harry sighed.

"Well that was certainly a productive day, Harry," Ollivander replied as they arrived back in his shop. The alley outside had long since darkened. Harry sighed wearily and plopped down in the rickety chair Ollivander normally reserved for customers. The eccentric wandmaker had insisted they pay a visit to everyone of importance in the ministry...

"Don't worry Harry; you can come in to the shop late tomorrow so you can recover." He snickered as he said 'recover' and turned away

from Harry's glare. "Come now Harry, you should appreciate how far you've come in just nine days of immersion in the wizarding world. So, while you're regaining your strength, old man, I'll tell you what we'll do tomorrow. All of the things you ordered less than a week ago should be ready tomorrow; I'll collect those things and get everything together. Also, be ready tomorrow to present a few names you've picked out to become your solicitor and Wizengamot representative. And remember, in two days, just two days, you will be meeting the Longbottoms. But enough of that- go; rest and recover, be ready to work hard tomorrow." And with that Harry left the wand maker's shop on a dazed journey for the comfort of his bed.

AN: I don't own Harry Potter. Thanks to all who read, and all who reviewed. I know I said this chapter would be out tonight, but my work schedule changed. Have a Happy New Year! Again, I would like to thank David305 for bringing some grammatical gaffes to my attention.

Chapter Four: Picking Up Speed

"Don't rush it; work with your magic," Ollivander told Harry. All the progress he'd made two days ago on the disillusionment charm seemed to have vanished. He'd only had very minimal success with the charm today; two or three times at most. He almost couldn't get the charm to work at all. It was nearly dinner time, and Harry was feeling hungry, weary, and tired. "Harry, feel your magic. Reach out, connect with it; work together. You will never succeed as a wizard if you don't get a feel for your magic." Harry warily raised his wand again, and put all his energy into his wand movements, desperately trying to make the dummy blend in. There was a familiar outpouring of magic, and once again, the dummy dissolved. Ollivander sighed and threw up his hands in exasperation. He gestured for Harry to take a seat.

Once he was seated Ollivander said, "You were able to cast the charm expertly a few days ago. Yet now, you seem incapable of repeating your previous performance. Why?" He stared at Harry. "What has changed, Harry? Let me into your mind; let me see if I can find the problem." Harry was scared at the prospect of letting Ollivander in once again; what if he tampered with it? "Please, Harry. Please, let me try and help you." Harry decided to trust his instincts; he relaxed his mental shielding and felt Ollivander enter his mind.

Ollivander seemed to strain under the pressure of connecting his mind to Harry's. As the minutes went by, Ollivander's breathing became frenzied. Finally, with a gasp, Ollivander broke the connection and staggered out of his chair. Harry rushed down to stop him from hitting the floor. He began pulling Ollivander to his feet. After a long struggle, he finally managed to get Ollivander back on his feet. Once he was fully aware of his faculties again, he turned to stare at Harry; his expression conveyed a deep sense of sorrow.

"I feel I must apologize Harry." He sighed sadly. "I hope you'll find it in your heart to forgive me someday. For everything." He took a breath. "The reason you are now having trouble with that charm is

from a psychological reaction that is now preventing you from fully using your magic." Harry stared at him blankly, so Ollivander elaborated. "When you discovered your prophesized destiny yesterday, though you eventually calmed down and became willing to accept it, your magic didn't. It is actively rebelling against any attempt you make to use it. It is a mark of how far you've come that you were able to get that charm working at all."

Harry stared at him. The shock of yesterday's events unhinged his magic? "So what can we do about this, Mr. Ollivander?"

He had summoned over a few books, and was hurriedly flipping through them. After several moments of searching, Ollivander waved his wand and a dozen potion containers floated into the room while a soft, comfortable looking couch materialized. "Lie down Harry and do exactly as I say."

Harry laid face-up on the couch while Ollivander handed him a vial. "Drink it all down. I know it is extremely bitter tasting, but drink." Harry wolfed down the bitter potion; it tasted like bile. It was awful. "We're just getting started Harry," Ollivander said mournfully as he handed him another potion.

Half an hour later, Harry was finished ingesting some of the foulest tasting substances known to man. His head felt like it was on fire, and he was having extreme difficulty breathing. "I am going to put you into an enchanted sleep, and I hope that when you have awoken, your magic will be stabilized," Harry heard Ollivander call, as if from far away. And he knew no more...

He stood at the bank of a mighty river, the water rushing past with the intensity of cars on a freeway. Behind him was the entrance to a forest. Harry could hear the cawing of the birds, the rushing of unseen woodland creatures, the gentle swaying of various colored leaves in the wind. Harry felt a pull from the forest... it was faint, like a whisper in the night. It called out to Harry, beckoned him forward. Harry turned to face the forest; tranquil and serene in all its glory. He could feel the pull; it seemed to become stronger by the minute. Harry's resistance gave way and he began walking. Soon, the river was no longer in view. The foliage got thicker, and the gentle cawing of the woodland creatures was replaced by a constant rustling all around him. Still Harry kept walking onward.

He finally arrived in a clearing; the thick trees gave way to flat grassland. The noise of the forest creatures died away instantly. In the middle of the clearing stood a well with grey bricks adorning its outer shell and covered with a red shingled roof. The well seemed to give off an aura of silence that shielded itself from the rest of the forest. The well symbolized what Harry used to draw his magic.

Harry took an eager step forward, thinking that if he went to the well, and drew magic from it, his psychological block would end. Another step and suddenly a grey cloud began emanating from the well. It gathered directly in front of Harry and began to take form; a ghostly grey mirror image of himself...

"Surprised?" the copy asked with a gravely version of his own voice. Harry was speechless; what the hell did Ollivander make him drink? "Running to Ollivander again, Harry?" his replica sneered.

"What are you?" Harry asked bravely.

His visage adopted a pained expression. "Why, Harry, I'm you. Or at least I'm a part of you that doesn't lack sense. Call me Harold."

Harry stared; he was having a conversation with himself by a well of his magic? Wait, doesn't lack sense...? "How do I lack sense, Harold?"

His replica chuckled. "Oh Harry, the silly things you want to do; like selling out to Flamel and Ollivander." His expression turned sharply. "Even after they manipulated you, you wish to work with them; to be used. Oh, they will use you, just as that fool Dumbledore wishes to use you; you are their one hope for destroying Voldemort."

"And supposing just for a second that you are right: what would you have me do, Harold? Go up to Voldemort and offer to defect?" Harry countered.

Harold shook his head. "No, no, Harry, you misunderstand me. My question is: why do you have to get involved at all?" Harry stared at the apparition. "Really Harry, you've been thrust into a completely new world with medieval rules, and you're being told that offing the latest powerful Dark Lord is our sole purpose. You, an eleven year old boy not in the Wizarding world ten days, is told he's the lucky soul who will solve the latest dark lord problem. These are the

people you want to remain with? Didn't you inherit a nice Sicilian villa? I think that you should go inspect it for the next ten or fifteen years instead of dealing with all this nonsense; if anyone asks, say you wanted to thoroughly inspect your holdings."

Harry laughed bitterly. "Right; so your solution to this burden being on my shoulders is to run away?" Harold nodded. "And to get my attention, you consciously stopped me from properly using my magic? You, who so values not getting involved, stopped me from learning a charm that might mask my presence and keep out of these sordid affairs?"

"It's not the charm Harry, it's the principle. You, my naive counterpart, have some sick desire to run headlong into danger and end up dead. To do that, you are going to use magic as your principal weapon. Hence, if I wanted to stop you from rushing into danger, it's only logical I would disable your magic. What you fail to understand Harry, is that I," Harold pointed to himself, "Am the only one here who represents your self-interest. And I am a firm believer that continuing to live is in your self interest, rather than you doing something stupid and reckless and getting yourself, and by extension me, killed." Harold thought for a second. "And it's not running away; it's a tactical retreat from insanity."

Harry snorted. This was the reason he couldn't properly use his magic, so it was time to use a few tricks Ollivander had showed him. "Oh, a tactical retreat?" He forced a laugh. "Seriously, I know you claim to be my guide to proper self-preservation." Harold nodded. "Then think about your plan. You are basically telling me, the returning media darling," Ollivander had made certain to emphasize his importance in the wizarding world, "To run away when many different factions, both national and international, want me for something, whether it's to support their cause or to dismember my head from my body. If I go to Hogwarts, no one can overtly strike at me for the next seven years. Whatever "Double D's" game is, he wants me alive and well. So, though he apparently wishes to use me for whatever ends, he is going to have to direct resources to keep me safe. So if we do nothing to attract the old man's attention until we're in a position to stand on our own two feet, then he will have to devote his time and energy to safeguarding us from these enemies. However, if we did what you suggested, rather than having this crafty "leader of the light" being a human shield from unknown enemies, thus buying us valuable time, he would instead, like the

unknown enemies, devote his resources to a similar cause; hunting us down." Harold looked hesitant so Harry pressed on. "To do what you propose Harold, is impractical. I am the Boy-Who-Lived. Your proposition will have that fame used against me; the English organizing a coalition to bring me home will be because I am the "Boy-Who-Lived." If, however, we do what I propose and go to Hogwarts, then I can put that fame to use making contacts and building alliances and getting stronger; all of which, under the right circumstances, can be used for a quick escape. So I vote for Hogwarts. Now can I please have the use of my magic back?"

Light flooded Harry's eyes and he quickly shut them. He heard chuckling.

"Problem solved, Mr. Potter?" Ollivander asked in obvious relief. Harry finally lifted himself up. He felt incredibly stiff.

"Yes, Ollie, it won't be a problem," Harry said, his voice sounding hoarse and weak.

"Give it one more try, Harry," Ollivander commanded beckoning to the dummy.

Harry grabbed his wand which had fallen onto the floor and pointed it at the dummy. He muttered the incantation while waving his wand and a pulse of magic left his wand and connected with the dummy which blended into the white wall behind it; nearly indistinguishable. He turned to Ollivander, who smiled broadly.

"Problem solved, Mr. Potter. Now come with me, though I know you're exhausted; I have your things in the back. I've put them in your trunk, the organizational system I used will be apparent, and you can combine it with your other items." Harry groggily followed Ollivander into the back rooms.

Through his hazy vision, Harry caught sight of a beautiful mahogany trunk, with a thick, chestnut shell guarding its contents. Facing him, in the middle of the trunk just below the opening, was a shiny, golden, plate. Several different shapes were cut out of the gold, representing the different keys to open the differing compartments. Ollivander passed Harry the ring with five differently shaped keys attached.

Harry took the key ring numbly and walked over to the trunk. He knelt down and examined his keys; finally grabbing hold of one and thrusting it into the lock. A twist and it opened, as Harry gazed inside. It was his wardrobe compartment. Harry marveled at how many sets of clothes- robes, pants, shirts, undergarments- were placed in the compartment, ready for him to wear. He closed the compartment.

Looking at his keys, he found a block shaped key that he put into a different lock. He turned it, and another compartment revealed itself. He was amazed when he leaned over and saw the library Ollivander set up. Inside the compartment, after climbing down the ladder, were rows upon rows of books; what looked like a hundred rows. In the center of the compartment were three gigantic books, each with the Potter family crest, the Black family crest, the Slytherin family crest, and the Peverell family crest on their covers. These books were fitted securely under a glass cover. Right next to the grimiores, sitting atop a special ivory table, was a small book with a plain black cover; "Harry J. Potter" was written on its cover.

"That is a special book tied directly to you. You are the only one who can write in it, and you can use it to store your notes and ideas on the various subjects. You can learn to modify it to better suit your needs after a lot of study in Arithmancy, Warding, and Enchanting. It also has a few other features you'll learn to use in time." Harry removed his head from where he had been gazing in and shut the trunk. "Take it back to your room, Harry. Remember, be here for noon tomorrow."

Harry nodded dumbly as he grabbed the trunk by the polished silver handles and carried it out of Ollivander's shop. Even though it was late, he'd be sure to get a good meal before he finished packing his stuff and went to bed. He wanted to be ready for the Longbottoms.

Harry had picked out his best dress robes, black and freshly laundered, for his meeting with the Longbottoms. He had paid a lot of attention to how he looked; combing his hair several times. He barely noticed what he ate that morning. As soon as it got close to noon, Harry rushed out of the Leaky Cauldron. He entered the shop five minutes before the Longbottoms were scheduled to arrive. Mr. Ollivander beckoned him to take a seat in one of the four comfortable red armchairs he laid out.

"Remember to follow the basic rules of courtesy I drilled into your head. Augusta is someone who is very 'by the book' when it comes to etiquette. From what I understand, Neville is a very timid person. So don't be surprised if he's mostly silent while Augusta does all the talking," Ollivander reminded him. Harry nodded curtly. He was keeping an eye on the time via his watch.

At exactly noon, a sharp crack issued from the front of the shop. There stood a tall, thin witch with a bony complexion and a vulture hat and a red handbag to go with her matching red outfit. Beside her was a nervous round-faced boy with dark blonde hair and a slightly pudgy frame. The witch in red moved forward to enter Ollivander's as the boy scrambled after her. There was the familiar tinkling of the bell that served to confirm their identities.

Mr. Ollivander and Harry stood in greeting. "Good afternoon, Augusta. It is a pleasure to see you again." He noticed Augusta Longbottom's outright hostile look at Harry. "Ah, may I introduce Harry Potter; I have recently become advisor of the Potter family." Augusta's look of hostility faded away almost immediately to be replaced with a look of respect. Neville looked even more nervous than he had been a moment ago.

Augusta bowed. "It is a pleasure to see you again, Emanuel. And greetings to you as well, Master Potter. I am Augusta Longbottom, and this is my grandson, Neville." He bowed as if on cue, as Madam Longbottom moved to take a seat. Neville moved to take the one unoccupied chair.

"So, Augusta, I hope you will excuse my frankness, but I asked you to come so that Neville might be matched to a wand," Ollivander said.

"Yes, and I do not believe that will be necessary. Frank's wand will serve Neville well," Madam Longbottom replied brusquely.

"I hope you will pardon my impudence, but I disagree," Harry said, taking the cue he and Ollivander had previously arranged. Augusta turned to him, the look of hostility flickering across her face. "I mean no offense, but he is my god-brother-", Neville looked shocked at that piece of information, "-And as such, I would like him to be armed with the best means to defend himself," Harry finished swiftly.

"I am uncertain where you have obtained your information, but I feel I must inform you that Neville isn't your god brother," Augusta replied.

"Madam, I have the will of James and Lily Potter with me, which states that right after my godfather, Frank and Alice Longbottom were to become my guardians. Obviously, there was a matter of poor execution, but I still consider Neville as good as a brother," Harry finished as Neville turned red. "I can retrieve it for you if you like, though it is buried in an endless library of unsorted documents, or I can send you the will courtesy of Gringotts."

"Leaving that aside, what does that have to do with getting Neville a new wand?" Madam Longbottom replied.

"As I'm sure you know, the wand chooses the wizard. Frank Longbottom's wand is, simply put, Franks'. He has used that wand a good ten years. It knows him and responds to him. Why on Earth would it suddenly yield to Neville's will?" Harry asked.

She was silent for a moment, so Harry pressed on. "I could never know how tough it is for you to see your son and daughter-in-law in St. Mungo's, but it doesn't seem healthy to try and turn Neville into an exact clone of his father, either," Harry said gently.

Augusta's first instinct was to reach for her wand, but suddenly she paused. After staring at Harry for a few moments, she buried her head in her hands. "All right, fine," she ground out bitterly. "I suppose you both have a point. Neville should get his own wand."

Mr. Ollivander sprang up. "Excellent. Now, Mr. Longbottom, if you will step over here." Neville timidly walked over to Mr. Ollivander, who began using the tape measure on Neville. He went into the backroom to get wands.

Harry walked over to Neville, who looked like he might wet himself, and laid a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Relax, Neville. This isn't a test. Somewhere in this store, there is a wand for you. But it does you no good to have a wand if you aren't confident you can do a spell." Neville was at first startled by Harry's attempts to calm him down, but he finally nodded and composed himself as Ollivander came back with several boxes of wands.

Ten minutes later, Neville had found his wand; 13 inches made of cherry wood and unicorn hair. Harry shook his hand. "Congratulations, Neville," he said with a wide smile.

"Yes, I think we can expect great things from you, Mr. Longbottom," said Mr. Ollivander.

"You did well, Neville," Augusta Longbottom replied calmly. She turned to Harry. "I'm not sure if you're aware, but the Longbottoms were historically close allies with the Potters."

"I am aware, Madam," said Harry courteously.

"Then it is good to know that our alliance is still strong. The Longbottoms will be at your side whenever you require," she said.

"Thank you, Madam Longbottom." He turned to Neville. "I'll see you at Hogwarts. Look for me on the Express, alright?"

Neville nodded, "Thanks, Harry." With that, the Longbottoms left.

Ollivander turned to Harry. "Excellent job, Harry. Now then, back to work..."

"So Harry, are you ready to begin trying the animagus transformation?" Mr. Ollivander asked idly six days after they had met with the Longbottoms. It had taken Harry another two days to perfect the disillusionment charm. After that, Mr. Ollivander had taught him the summoning charm. It took Harry a day to perfect it. And then Mr. Ollivander had moved on to teaching Harry how to summon things non-verbally. That was a nightmare.

The first day, none of the objects Harry was supposed to be summoning moved an inch. The second day, Mr. Ollivander coached him through it, step by step, with the result that Harry had partial success. On the third day, however, Harry had been able to perfect the charm. Mr. Ollivander tested him on it again today, but Harry apparently had it down.

"I'd love to give it a shot. What do I do?" Harry asked eagerly. Ever since he'd gotten the library, he'd been reading about his parents. His father had kept a journal, and he'd talked about becoming an animagus at fifteen. Harry wanted to follow in his footsteps.

"The animagus transformation is a kind of wandless magical self-transfiguration. So first you must be able to cast non-verbally, and then you must be able to reliably use wandless magic. So try the summoning charm again, but do it without your wand, and without speaking. When you have that down, we can progress further," Mr. Ollivander explained.

If trying to summon some of the objects laid out, books and pillows, without speaking was bad, then trying to do it without a wand was a disaster in the making. The few times his emotions leaked into his attempts to wandlessly summon things, it resulted in all of the various objects Ollivander had laid out being catapulted at him.

After several long hours of work, Mr. Ollivander stopped him. "We'll continue working on this tomorrow. Remember, tomorrow is young Ms. Bones' special day. Do dress accordingly."

Sweat poured down Harry's face as he struggled to move the books on the table. He had gotten to Ollivander's a few hours early to put in some more work on wandless magic. So here he was in the backroom trying to summon books from a table a few feet away. He was finally having some success, though his ability to wield it was sporadic at best. Come on, he told himself, one more try. He began pulling from his reservoir of magic, determined to get this right one. Once he'd gathered enough magic, he focused on pulling the book towards him, having it fly into his hand. And sure enough, the book rocketed from the table and snapped into his hand with a thud. Harry was elated, he'd gotten it. Sure it would take a lot more practice to do it effortlessly, but the important thing was that he could do it.

From the front of the shop sounded the familiar tinkling of the bell; the Bones'. Harry stepped out of the backroom and into the front of the shop to see a square-jawed witch with grey hair and a monocle at her right eye. Beside her were two young girls, one with long red hair and freckles, and the other a pink faced girl with blonde hair done up in pigtails.

Mr. Ollivander looked up from his copy of the Daily Prophet. "Ah, Amelia Bones, and her niece, and," he peered at the blonde girl curiously, "You've already been matched with a wand, Ms. Abbott-10 inches cedar and unicorn hair." He looked towards the backroom for Harry, and all three witches followed his gaze.

"Finally done it properly, Mr. Potter?" he asked wearily. He had to repair his room several times yesterday. Harry's name had a noticeable effect on both younger witches, who began blushing and looking away.

"Yes sir. May I take my lunch hour now?" he asked politely. Mr. Ollivander had made it clear that he shouldn't stick around if the Bones' didn't want him present.

As if on cue, Amelia Bones interrupted them. "Nonsense, Mr. Potter. Hannah and Susan have wanted to meet you for ages. Won't you please stay?"

"If you insist, Madam Bones," Harry responded politely. He turned to the girls. "And you are-?"

"Hannah," squeaked the girl with pigtails.

"Susan," the red haired girl finally said after several awkwardly silent moments.

"Excellent. So let's get the show on the road, Ollie," he said smiling at Mr. Ollivander.

"As long as you aren't on break, keep practicing, Mr. Potter," he ordered.

Harry went into the back of the shop and carried out the small table and the books he had been using for practice. Setting them up so he was far enough away, Harry began to try and summon them.

"Stop right there!" commanded Madam Bones. "You aren't supposed to use magic outside of Hogwarts until you're seventeen!"

"Or, unless your emancipated, which I assure you I am, Madam. Please check your files, because Gringotts and the Ministry have already recognized my emancipation. Thus, I can do magic outside of Hogwarts. Of course the tradeoff is, I now have to pay taxes, but such is life," Harry mused.

Mr. Ollivander returned from the back of the shop with several boxes of wands, as Harry settled back into trying to summon the book. He

began repeating what he had done during his last attempt, and after a few seconds, the book flew into his hand. Harry placed it back on the table, unaware of the stunned and awed looks on the witch's faces.

"What did you do, Mr. Potter?" breathed Madam Bones.

"I summoned the book to me," Harry responded distractedly. He was making another attempt at summoning the book. Sure enough, a few seconds later, it flew to his outstretched hand.

"How are you doing it without a wand?" Madam Bones demanded.

"Wandlessly," Harry replied dryly. He reset the book and made another attempt. This time the book he summoned landed at his feet. "Hmm, not enough power."

"Most wizards and witches can't use wandless magic, Mr. Potter," Madam Bones scolded.

That caused Harry to stop practicing. "Really? You mean you never did accidental magic? There aren't animagi in the world?" Harry asked in mock concern.

"Of course I did-," she replied hotly.

"Did anyone hand you a wand to do accidental magic?" Harry asked.

She stared at him for a long time, and then finally looked away. Harry just went back to practicing.

Not two seconds later, the wand Susan was using illuminated in a shower of sparks.

"Excellent, Ms. Bones," Ollivander beamed.

"Congratulations, Susan," said Harry. She blushed and looked down.

"Yeah, Sus," said Hannah wrapping an arm around her friend.

"Use it well, Ms. Bones," said Ollivander as he put the wand back in its box and wrapped it. He turned to Madam Bones. "That will be five galleons."

She paid and the witch trio walked to the exit of the shop. "I'll see you two at Hogwarts," Harry said.

Madam Bones turned to Harry. "I'll be keeping a close eye on you," she said neutrally.

"And I you, Madam," replied Harry just as neutrally.

The witches left at that, though Hannah and Susan were blushing again.

"Tomorrow you have to meet with your new solicitor," Ollivander remarked a week and change later. Harry had finally mastered summoning things wandlessly and non-verbally after six days. However, before Ollivander was willing to make the jump, he insisted Harry learn the shield charm. Verbally, it had taken him less than a day to master. Learning it non-verbally had taken him three days. Now, Ollivander was apparently ready to introduce the animagus transformation.

"The animal you saw was a raven, yes?" Harry nodded. "Okay, I will admit that as I'm not an animagus myself, I can only tell you what I have read on the process. Now then, the magic you have been tapping into; reach out and feel it."

Harry turned his focus inward and through the use of his occlumency, began trying to reach out for his magic. He began following the pulsations of magic in his body. The magic got thicker and more pronounced as he followed the pathways. Suddenly he was in his core; the focus of all magic in his body. It was a vibrant silver sphere of magic, always pulsating. Harry mentally reached out and tried to connect with the core. It was like a bolt of lightning had hit him and the residual electricity continually sped through his body. It was intense and painful, and Harry felt like he couldn't let go. Desperate to escape, he severed his mental connection and opened his eyes.

Ollivander had backed away a few paces, and was looking impressed. "Congratulations, Mr. Potter. You are the youngest wizard who has ever consciously produced a visible aura." He saw Harry's look of confusion. "Silver rays of magical light seemed to emanate from you, while you searched for your core. Excellent; you

are ready. Now then, the next step is to return to your core and to try and manipulate it into a Raven's shape. This normally takes years of preparation to do, but then again, so does touching your magic. As I said, return to your magic, and try to transfigure yourself into a Raven, while keeping your mind. I don't expect you to get this quickly; in fact I'd wager we'll still be working on this next year."

Harry returned to his core and reached out to touch it again. Once more, the magic flowed through him, the intensity nearly overwhelming him again. Harry struggled to try and command it to turn him into a Raven, when suddenly, the connection was severed.

Harry opened his eyes. His arms felt weird. He looked at them and nearly fainted. They were wings. He looked down at his body, he still had feet. He looked at Ollivander, who was staring, open-mouthed, at him.

"That shouldn't be possible," Ollivander said blankly. He was silent. "You shouldn't be able to make that much progress. How?"

"Er, in my father's journal, he listed the steps he took to become an animagus. When he got to this step, he described the hardest thing being not backing away from the magical connection, but being enveloped by it," Harry explained.

"Amazing... simply amazing. Try again, try to finish the transformation," Ollivander commanded.

Harry returned to his core, and making sure to fill himself to the brim with his magic, to revel in its intensity, he began willing it to turn him into a raven. He felt the magic morphing him, and Harry kept concentrating, despite the pain he felt. A Vernon beating was worse. Onward he pushed, trying to will his body to become like his wings.

Suddenly he opened his eyes. He could see the lines on Ollivander's face as if he was right next to him. He looked left. The door looked as if it were right in front of him. All around the room, things that had been too far or too insignificant were seemingly now magnified. Suddenly, he realized he could hear every breathe Ollivander took. The soft ticking of the clock on the far wall added to this rhythm. He looked down; his body was gone, replaced by a black torso. He looked at Ollivander again who was staring at him. He opened his mouth to ask what was wrong, but his all that escaped was a "Caw!"

He closed his beak... BEAK! He couldn't believe it... years indeed, he was a raven!

He spread his wings and tried to fly to Ollivander's shoulder. Except that there wasn't a manual on how to fly, and fluttering his wings didn't cut it, so he crashed from his chair to the floor. He cawed mournfully, before trying to set himself upright. Once he'd turned over, he began flapping his wings, trying to gain flight. He rushed forward while flapping his wings, and suddenly he was airborne. It was wonderful, an intoxicating feeling to see the world below him as it was passed by. He shifted his wings and headed for Ollivander's shoulder. He stopped flapping and bared his scaly talons, and he was sitting upright on Ollivander's shoulder. He hopped off and flew back to his seat.

He began reaching for his magic once again, commanding it to return him to his regular form. He opened his eyes to see regularly, no wait, a little better than normal, though his hearing seemed to have lost its enhancement. He stood up, back in his regular form. He walked over and tapped Mr. Ollivander on the shoulder.

"Mr. Ollivander? Wake up!" He prodded the old man, who finally snapped out of his trance.

"Marvelous! Simply marvelous! I have never- congratulations, Mr. Potter," the old man sputtered, and Harry had to laugh. "Now that you've done it once, let's get to perfecting it."

Harry and Ollivander worked on perfecting the transformation, so Harry could do it quickly and almost effortlessly. This involved first making transforming almost reflexive, and then getting more familiar with his form, by having Ollivander shoot stunning spells at him while he dodged and weaved between spells. And when Harry left at the end of the day, he felt a little closer to his father for sharing such a gift.

"Mr. Goldstein will see you now," said the elderly male clerk who had greeted Harry the next morning. Of all the wizarding solicitor files Mr. Ollivander had handed him, Harry had selected him. Mr. Goldstein was supposed to have a very good record in dealing with the Wizengamot and knowing how to handle the muddled wizarding laws that annoyed so many people. And Mr. Goldstein had been his parent's solicitor...

Harry walked into the office. Rows upon rows of books on wizarding law littered the bookshelves on the far wall. The opposite wall had pictures of a young blonde-haired boy standing with his parents, one of them being the man behind the desk that was littered with papers. He was a middle aged man with some creases in his face, fashionable glasses, and neat blonde hair.

He rose from his seat. "Mr. Potter, or would you prefer Lord Potter?" he said politely as he held out his hand.

"Harry will be fine, thanks," he replied easily as he took a seat opposite Mr. Goldstein. "So I'm sure you know why I'm here today."

"Yes, Emanuel was in touch with me. He did question me extensively about the possibility of my firm handling the responsibility of being your solicitor, as well as handling your vote on the Wizengamot until you come of age. I have to say I am honored to be offered such an opportunity," he finished earnestly.

"You are very well qualified for the position. If I gave you the position, what would you do for me?" Harry asked.

"First and foremost; I will do nothing without your say-so. However, I will be able to handle any legal disputes that come your way, though with the many allowances you've been granted, legal challenges should be few and far between. I can also interface with the goblins in handling your investment, and the oath I would give would prevent me from intentionally acting against your financial interests. Finally, I will be able to represent your views on the Wizengamot; all you have to do is communicate which way you want me to vote and I will act on your behalf. If you don't have a particular inclination either way on an issue, I will vote to try and represent your interests and opinions. Is that acceptable?" he asked.

"Yes sir, I would like to retain you as my solicitor and my voice on the Wizengamot," Harry responded, and Mr. Goldstein beamed.

He began retrieving contract paperwork to be formally made the Potter family solicitor. Harry had to use a blood quill again, which he was really starting to hate. Harry agreed to pay him two hundred galleons a month to keep him in his employ. After a few hours of

stipulating terms, receiving oaths, and signing paperwork, Harry had a new solicitor. It was getting dark as Harry exited his office.

On his way out, they were met by a smaller clone of Mr. Goldstein. "Dad, Mom sent me to bring you home for supper," said the blonde boy.

"Harry, I'd like to meet my son Anthony, who is starting Hogwarts with you in a few days." Harry held out a hand to shake and Anthony shook it eagerly. "I have to go, Mr. Potter. I will keep in touch. Take care." Harry nodded and walked over to the floo to get back to Mr. Ollivanders.

"You have come a long way, Mr. Potter," Mr. Ollivander remarked the day before Harry was to depart to Hogwarts. He was sufficiently able to change into his animagus form after these few days of practice. "You are going to do well at Hogwarts. However, before you leave, I have one last thing to teach you before next summer; how to apparate. Oh, and before I forget, those rituals I promised you earlier we will deal with next summer. Now then, apparation will be vital to escaping from a bad situation. Fortunately it is very easy to learn. Now simply will yourself to another location, like that corner of the shop."

Harry tapped into his magic, which being an animagus had properly taught him, and willed himself to the other side of the room. There was a loud crack, and Harry stood in the spot he'd intended. Magic had become incredibly easy now that he could reach into his magical core at will.

"Excellent, now..." Ollivander drilled him in apparating quickly and almost silently if stealth was required. Apparating was incredibly easy compared to silent spell-casting and becoming an animagus and he'd already done both. Finally, as night began to fall Ollivander called a halt to the lessons and Harry retook a familiar seat.

"Once again, I must congratulate you on all the progress you've made. Hogwarts should be no problem. Now then, before you leave, I want to give you some advice. First, always be wary of those around you," he saw Harry's look, "I'm not saying everyone can't be trusted, but no one can be instantly trusted. You are the Boy-Who-Lived; people will flock to you like flies. That means diplomacy will be key; because you won't be able to immediately tell who has value

and who doesn't. There are some you can trust; like Neville, and perhaps Robert Goldstein's son... Allen was it? Anyway, they are probably trustworthy- I noticed Neville seems to look up to you, judging by the frequent correspondence I see you with in the shop, and Robert Goldstein probably drilled it into his son's head to behave towards such an important client. Everyone else; be wary."

"Now then, your first instinct might be to discount all the Slytherins as possible acquaintances of value. To which I would ask: why throw away a potential goldmine? First, it's possible that you could be a Slytherin, though I doubt it simply because you don't want to be looking over your shoulder the next seven years, and Slytherin has a disproportionate number of children of former Death Eaters. There will be people worth knowing, but the tradeoff would be trying to sleep with your eyes open, your bed warded, and your wand under your pillow. Though I suppose it would ready you to apprentice under Alastor Moody. Anyway, the other three houses will probably provide a better living environment, though Gryffindor would force you to stray from the path of enlightenment. Gryffindors are known for being brave and reckless, which excludes common sense and intelligence."

"In addition, your wanded classes will probably be easier to learn in, because of your almost unparalleled connection to magic. The tradeoff is that you will have to redouble your efforts in the theoretical classes. It is especially important that you have a good grasp on potions. It would be wise to stockpile your own brews for emergency. In fact, if you read some of the Peverell literature, you will probably find the secrets for enchantment, and you could make your own personal potions storage cabinet. Though I wouldn't trust some of the older versions of magic they experimented with; there are newer and more efficient spells to add to you repertoire. While I can't overstate the importance of learning the art of potions, I also can't overstate the difficulties you're going to have in learning it in class. Potions masters notoriously have little patience when dealing with classes. Severus Snape has even less. Remember to study up on basic ingredient reactions, and some of the first year syllabus potions."

"And finally, I can't urge you enough to constantly study. Voldemort is out there; plotting, planning, a threat ever-looming. He will someday return- be it a year, half a decade, a full decade, or even a century. However, there is the distinct possibility you have to face

Voldemort soon. The spells we mastered were for you to gain a good command of your magic, and a way to shield yourself and escape. You will need more. I am no expert on the art of dueling, but I think your best bet would be to heavily incorporate transfiguration into whatever style you choose. You seem to have a natural skill with it, and you should play to your strengths. But you will have to find a location to practice. I'll let you in on a secret from my Hogwarts days. There is a room on the seventh floor of the castle, opposite a tapestry of a man named Barnabas the Barmy trying to teach trolls ballet, that can be accessed. Simply walk past it three times concentrating on what you need the room to be. I still remember when the room became filled with various pieces of lumber and wand cores so I could practice wand-crafting during my Hogwarts days. Now then, you should get to bed early tonight; tomorrow will be a busy day."

Harry thanked Mr. Ollivander and walked out of the shop. Tomorrow... tomorrow was Hogwarts. It certainly would be a busy day.

AN Part The Second: I know I will probably hear complaints about Harry learning his animagus form so soon. These complaints are certainly valid, but I would like to offer my justification.

First, learning an animal form has become something synonymous with a powerful Harry Potter, where he has a cool or unusual animal, but never uses it. That won't be happening here. He might, like several thousand wizards throughout history, find a second form, also a normal animal, but it will be nothing magical in nature. Harry Potter will find many uses for this form as the story progresses. Consider what Harry has learned thus far, and what his future actions might include.

Second, I ask that any who object to consider that James Potter was an animagus at fifteen. The elder Potter has already done all of the ground work, along with his friends, on becoming an animagus. Leaving what is in essence a comprehensive instruction book on how to be an animagus would translate to faster results.

Finally, consider all the ground work Harry has done. My concept of the animagus transformation includes using wandless magic as the catalyst to effect the change. His power is much greater than any other student in Hogwarts, thanks to the constant drain on his magic

from Voldemort, which also served to exercise and increase his magical output. And he has been refining control the entire month. Every exercise Ollivander had him doing was about strengthening magical control. My interpretation relies on a combination of magical control, wandless magic, and occlumency ability to retain the human mind, being the important components of transforming into an animal. This AU Harry Potter, in his time, has adequately acquired all three. I am certain there will be some, perhaps many, people who believe I am overpowering Harry. Almost everything he learns his first two/ three years, I can assure that there is some Death Eater out there who knows the spell/ concept, what-have-you, and can use it better. These Death Eaters are not going to lack for power or viciousness, and Voldemort is going to be a real evil genius, not just an insane Dark Lord Wannabe.

If this explanation does not satisfy you, and/or you wish to take me to task for this action, simply PM me.

Chapter Five: "You Are Waiting For A Train..."

"Do you have everything, Harry?" said Tom as Harry ate his breakfast the next morning. Harry had gotten up at dawn to pack away his few loose items, and stow Hedwig in her cage. Now he was polishing off a full breakfast of toast, pancakes, and bacon.

"Yes, Tom, I packed everything away this morning. What time is it?" asked Harry.

"It's nearly ten, Mr. Potter. If you get on the train early, you can reserve yourself a compartment in the back," Tom suggested.

"Well then, I think I'll do that." Harry declared. Harry finished eating and walked back to his room to get his trunk and Hedwig's cage. He took both in hands, another time he was really thankful for the feather-light charm on his trunk, and walked back down the stairs. Tom was waiting for him.

Tom clapped a hand on Harry's shoulder. "I wish you the best of luck at Hogwarts. Good luck with the sorting, and perhaps you'll end up in my old house, Hufflepuff."

"Thank you Tom, for everything," Harry said emotionally. "Without your help, this summer would have been infinitely worse. Thanks for all the time you put in on my behalf; someday I will repay you, if that even is possible."

"Take care Harry," Tom said as Harry grasped the trunk and owl cage and focused on apparating to platform 9 and $\frac{3}{4}$. There was a loud crack, and he appeared on the mostly deserted platform. There were only a few people already there, none of whom took notice of another person apparating onto the platform. Harry, with the trunk and cage still in hand, walked onto the train. After a bit of walking to the other end, he picked an empty compartment and stepped in. Harry stowed his trunk and opened Hedwig's cage so she could freely fly to Hogwarts. As she departed, she nipped his ear and hooted in thanks. Harry opened the library compartment, and decided to summon a book on potions; Ollivander said it was something he'd need to learn.

He did not know how long he was studying, but he finally looked up when his compartment door opened. A familiar brown haired girl poked her head in. "Is anyone sitting here?" asked Tracey Davis.

"No Tracey, you can take a seat," Harry said as he returned to his book.

Her face flushed. "How do you know who I am?" she asked confusedly.

'I was there when you got your wand. Hello, I'm Harry Potter, and I'm rather hurt you don't remember me," Harry said with a small smile as he looked up from his book.

Tracey's eyes bulged. She put her trunk on the rack opposite and hastily sat down.

Harry looked up from his reading again. "Breathing is a good thing," he commented airily; Tracey had apparently forgotten that important rule. "Relax, so I'm Harry Potter; so what?" She was still silent. "So," he said putting the book aside, "Tell me about yourself." She was still silent. "Come on. All right; I'll start. I'm Harry Potter, who from everyone's account except Voldemort's," finally a reaction, though it was her flinching, "And my own somehow managed to defeat said dark lord at the age of one, spent ten years with abusive muggle relatives, and have only been back in this world for a month. Your turn."

Tracey smiled nervously. "All right, you win. I'm Tracey Davis; a half-blood, which is awful because my father says I am certain to become a Slytherin. My childhood was much better than yours. Oh, and I know barely anything about magic. Happy?"

"Should I get up and dance to show how happy I am?" Harry said dryly.

"Ooh, be careful, your sarcasm will get you into Slytherin," Tracey replied.

"I prefer to think of it as the wit of a raven," Harry airily replied. He was about to say something else when the compartment door opened and a familiar face walked in. "Neville!" He moved to help Neville with his trunk. He helped him lift it onto the rack, right next to

Harry's trunk. He gestured to Tracey. "That's Tracey Davis. Anyway, how have you been?"

"Fine, except I lost my toad, Trevor," he mumbled.

"You said his name was Trevor?" Harry asked. Neville nodded. Harry withdrew his wand, aware that the other two occupants were watching him, and silently summoned Trevor.

"Um, Harry, are you going to do a spell?" asked Neville nervously.

Suddenly, a small toad floated into the compartment and on to Harry's outstretched hand. "This is Trevor?" he asked.

Neville's eyes went wide and he nodded. Harry carefully handed him his toad. "How did you do that?" he asked in a whisper. "I mean, my Gran has always had to say the incantations."

Harry shrugged. "It's non-verbal magic; we learn it out sixth and seventh years, though some people find verbalizing the spell easier. Ollivander told me that doing the first spell non-verbally was the hardest, so he made me practice it with a summoning charm. That's the only piece of magic I know really well. Everything else is just a passing familiarity. You're Gran can probably cast it; it's just easier to do verbal magic."

"Did, ah, Ollivander teach you anything else?" asked Tracey innocently.

"He also taught me that there was no such thing as paranoia; there were just the cautious and the dead," he remarked, and Tracey began giggling.

He turned to Neville. "So what house do you think you will be in?"

Neville looked down. "I feel like I don't have any of the founder's qualities."

"Well then, the hat will just have to pick your best and put you into the correct house. My guess is Hufflepuff," Harry said. He saw Neville's look. "Let me guess: your gran wouldn't be happy?" He nodded. "Well, that's the kind of loyalty most 'Puffs have, if you're so concerned about what your grandmother would think."

They interrupted by another person entering their compartment; Goldstein. "Hey Harry, we met a few days ago. I'm Anthony Goldstein," he said holding out a hand.

Harry shook it vigorously. "Hey Anthony, we we're just discussing our future houses. The lovely lady over there is Tracey Davis, and this right here is my friend and god-brother, Neville Longbottom."

Anthony took a seat on Harry's other side. "Well I imagine I'll be a Ravenclaw. That's what house my father said he thought I would be in. Harry? Neville?"

"Nev' will probably be a Hufflepuff, and Tracey over there says she thinks she'll be a Slytherin. You'll probably share a dorm room with me, which means you'll be waking me in the morning," Harry grinned.

"If you insist, Harry. Do prefer ice water or near-boiling water as a wakeup call?" Anthony grinned back.

Further banter was prevented by the arrival of two more familiar faces, Hannah Abbott and Susan Bones.

"Hello Susan, Hannah," Harry said politely. "Did Madam Bones send you two to tail me?"

"Oh yes," Hannah eagerly agreed. "We're supposed to be on the watch for any evil plots and plans you have."

"I suppose surrounding myself with beautiful girls and faithful followers is a tip off of my impending ascension to dark lordship," Harry mused. "So why don't you two join us? Oh, on my right is Anthony Goldstein, to my left is Neville Longbottom, and opposite us is Ms. Tracey Davis."

The train began moving as the girls dragged in their luggage and placed it on the rack before flopping down next to Tracey.

"Let me guess before Anthony says it; two Hufflepuffs?" the girls nodded eagerly, so Harry turned to Neville. "At least you'll know people when you get sorted there."

"So what was that you were reading before we joined you?" Tracey asked.

Harry held up his potions book. "I have it on good advice that most potions masters have very little patience for an actual class. They prefer self-study and quiet days of brewing yet can't resist the lure of gold and a cushy teaching job. I doubt our soon-to-be potion's professor will be any different, so I was studying up on ingredient reactions and basic preparation techniques."

Susan decided to shift topics. "So you all heard about the Gringotts robbery?"

"Yeah, I was actually at the bank that day. When I went back a few days later to withdraw some more money, the goblins were in the midst of a security frenzy," Harry remarked.

"That must have been fun," Neville commented.

"They made me take an identification test to prove who I was," Harry replied. "Though I found that if you are polite to goblins, they will at least help you pass the time by kicking your ass in ten games of chess, rather than just handing you a magazine or something."

"You're that bad at chess?" asked Anthony.

"Yeah, and it was my first time playing wizard chess as well, so it wasn't helpful when the pieces were shouting at me to make this move or that. The goblin in question however, remarked that he'd never been more amused," Harry concluded.

"Did you ever finish that wandless magic practice?" Susan blurted out. The others stared at Harry.

"My advisor, Mr. Ollivander, had me practicing a few different ways of casting spells to better control my magic. You two," he gestured at Tracey and Neville, "Saw me cast a non-verbal spell. They saw me practicing that same charm wandlessly and non-verbally. It is too draining to do casually and waving my wand makes me feel important," Harry grinned.

"What else did he teach you?" asked Tracey eagerly.

"We went over a few simple spells: the summoning charm- I already demonstrated, and the shield charm. Being emancipated is such a wonderful thing," Harry remarked.

"So should I address you as Lord Potter?" asked Neville curiously.

"If I ever demanded you addressed me by title, which I won't then it would be Lord Potter-Black-Peverell. But that's neither here nor there; I don't want to be addressed formally. As a matter of fact, I don't really want to be addressed informally as the Boy-Who-Lived, but we can't always get what we want," Harry finished.

"You don't want to be the Boy-Who-Lived!" asked Hannah in horror and excitement.

"There is a tradeoff for everything, Hannah. For being 'the-Boy-Who-Lived' it's being stared at, various people trying to make you into a pawn, and being an orphan," Harry finished succinctly.

"What do you mean 'being made into a pawn'?" asked Susan.

"Simply put, I am the Boy-Who-Lived. There is such an irrational following of me that my word holds public sway. If my words were to be 'the minister of magic is doing an excellent job' then his approval rating would skyrocket. Any politician could factor that into an equation, and figure out that having some way of getting me to endorse them would be enough to run for minister," Harry finished.

"Irrational following." Tracey said with eyebrows raised.

"Yes, because any one year old can be expected to vanquish a Dark Lord. And of course, that one year old did it when no one, except himself and the person trying to kill him, was around. I believe it's much more likely that my parents did something that defeated him, but cost them their lives, and I was just caught in the backlash. Of course, I was one; I don't remember. However, if you could land an interview with Voldemort, then you could ask him," Harry said ignoring the gasps of horror at saying Voldemort's name.

"You said his name!" shrieked Susan.

Harry rolled his eyes. "He's supposed to be dead and gone. Why are you afraid of a dead man's name?"

They were all silent. "So what were your families like?" Harry asked.

He began listening to the other's childhood. First he heard about Hannah and Sue's, who had spent a lot of their childhood together, flying across the countryside, playing dress-up, and generally playing together because of how close their families were. Then Anthony talked about his father, the wizarding solicitor, which was what he one day wanted to be, and his mother, who sold home brewed potions. He also mentioned a few people in their year he knew from his childhood, like Terry Boot and the Patils, Padma and Pavarti. Neville spoke next, and his childhood made the other occupants rather uncomfortable, as he talked about his family thinking he was a squib until his uncle had forced accidental magic out of him, and spending his free time in the family greenhouse. Finally Tracey spoke about being the child of a wizard and a muggle woman, and how her mother was always rather hesitant and uncertain of how to deal with her, especially when she displayed accidental magic. Finally, Harry rounded it out by briefly mentioning his Aunt and Uncle and how he hated it there, to his return to the wizarding world, to the general horror of the other carriage occupants.

By then, the lunch trolley had rolled around, and they had all purchased a variety of sweets. Harry had grown accustomed to many of them from his month in Diagon Alley, though he still glanced suspiciously at Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans; he'd had bad experiences with those beans. When they had finished their sweets, Anthony pulled out his wizard chess set and challenged Neville to a game while Tracey, Susan, and Hannah all began discussing the latest Weird Sister's hit.

Harry occasionally looked up from his potion's book to see the people moving by their compartment; he noticed the blonde wizard from his first day in Diagon Alley had passed their compartment a few times. The fifth time he'd walked past however, with two gigantic boys accompanying him, he'd stopped and opened the compartment door.

"Have any of you seen Harry Potter?" he demanded.

"Yes actually," he could already tell he didn't like this person, "From what I understand he is in the very last compartment of the train," he responded genially. The boy left without a sound.

"What was all that about?" asked Susan.

"I met him in Diagon Alley, didn't really like him, and he never found out my name. So now if he's looking for me, let him have to work for it," Harry replied easily.

He dove back into his potions book, but he, and everyone else in the compartment, were interrupted five minutes later when a familiar black haired girl opened the door.

"Is Harry Potter in this compartment?" she asked resolutely.

"Right here, Daphne," Harry responded setting his book aside.

"How did you know my name?" she demanded.

"I was there when you were matched with a wand," Harry shrugged. He ignored Daphne's heated glare. "It isn't my fault your parents didn't think to check for any notice-me-not charms. Though I did enjoy hearing your father's declarations that there wasn't enough evidence to conclude I'd really had much to do with Voldemort's downfall, except be in the right place at the right time; made my day," Harry finished. "What can I do for you Daphne?" He asked politely.

"Can I speak with you privately?" she asked.

Harry shrugged and got up and walked out the compartment door. He followed Daphne as she walked a short ways down until there was an empty compartment. Harry followed Daphne into it with his wand in hand; he wouldn't put it past some people to use her as a decoy for an ambush.

She turned to him with a hesitant look on your face. "I don't know if you're aware, but there is an outstanding marriage contract between the Blacks and the Greengrasses that you have reactivated," she said with much trepidation.

"I am aware of the contract I inherited. Your sister Queenie is too old, and Astoria is invalid as long as you're a better match age-wise," Harry replied.

"What are your intentions?" she blurted out.

Harry blinked wishing he could be anywhere else. "I'm uncertain at this time. I know that I have the option to buy out before I turn seventeen. However, tradition dictates I at least meet with you once before buying out," he pointed out. Why did he have to deal with this now?

"It is a ways off, but before you buy out, my parents would like to have you over for dinner, say around the Christmas holidays," she continued on.

"I will send a reply to your parents with the next few weeks. But right now, other situations must take precedence," Harry said.

She smiled hesitantly, a beautiful smile, "Thank you Harry," she said as she left.

Harry shook his head and walked back to his compartment. He entered and retook his seat. "Harry, while you were gone, a group of red-heads came in asking for you," Neville said. Harry nodded and got back to reading.

He read for another hour or so as it became progressively darker outside. Finally, Harry pulled Neville and Anthony out of the compartment so they could all change into their Hogwarts robes and give the girls the space they needed. Soon, the train began slowing down. Finally it stopped, and an overhead voice told them their luggage would be taken to the school separately.

Harry's group headed out of the train and onto the rather chilly platform. "Firs' Years, Firs' Years," Hagrid's voice shouted. They headed over to join a growing crowd of first year students. After all the first years had swarmed over, Hagrid began leading them down a path. After walking a little ways, they heard Hagrid say, "Yeh'll get your first look at Hogwarts in a moment." They turned and the magnificent castle came into view with its lights flashing brightly, which served to illuminate the lake below. Hagrid led them down to the bank of the lake, where there was a fleet of boats. "No more'n

"four to a boat," he declared, as the group began scrambling into the boats.

Harry and Neville were joined by Susan and Hannah in the boat they occupied. Once everyone was in a boat, Hagrid shouted "FORWARD!" and the fleet of boats began gliding across the water. After some sailing, Hagrid shouted to lower their heads as they sailed under a curtain of ivy. Soon, they reached an underground harbor where they all scrambled out of the boats. Hagrid led them up a stone passageway where they eventually met grass, and after a short walk later, were standing in front of a huge, oak front door. Hagrid knocked a few times before the door opened to reveal a tall black-haired witch with a stern face who was dressed in emerald robes.

"The firs' years, Professor McGonagall," said Hagrid.

"Thank you, Hagrid. I will take them from here," she said as she pulled the door wide open. They followed professor McGonagall past the doorway to her right where hundreds of voices emanated from, and into small, empty side chamber. They crowded into the chamber, and when they were all inside the professor began talking. Harry tuned out her lecture; Ollivander had made certain to explain all of this to him beforehand.

"I shall return when we are ready for you," Professor McGonagall finished. "Please wait quietly," she said as she left the chamber.

"Any idea what the sorting involves?" Neville whispered timidly.

Harry shrugged. "Whatever it is, it will probably be some sort of examination of our personality. My guess would be a legilimens of some kind," he whispered back.

"What is a legilimens?" Neville whispered.

"A person who can examine people's thoughts and memories by using magic; it can be countered through Occlumency," Harry returned automatically. "Relax, whatever they do will only be allowed to see our thoughts this one time. If you're worried about what house you will be in remember that the examiner will just pick a person's strongest personality traits. I Still think that's your loyalty and willingness to work hard."

Neville's cheeks colored. "Thanks Harry," he muttered.

Any further conversation was interrupted by a red-head and a familiar blonde-haired boy engaging in a shouting match. Harry made sure to not involve himself when he saw they were arguing about which house was better: Gryffindor or Slytherin. Harry took this opportunity to scan the room. Some people were watching the squabble with interest. One person, a bushy haired girl, was talking rapidly about spells she'd learned, and asking if other people thought she'd need them. Harry spied Daphne, who was standing with Tracey chatting amicably. Anthony had apparently found his childhood friends, as he was over talking with a boy with brown hair, who Harry guessed was Terry Boot, and a pair of Indian twins, who must be the Patils. Other people around the room, like a tall girl with blood-red hair, were looking terrified at the prospect of the sorting. The people who looked the most nervous, Harry could guess, were probably muggleborns. Though there was the occasional pure-blood or half-blood who was looking terrified as well, like Hannah and Susan. Further observation was disrupted by a flock of ghosts appearing through the wall. Several people, including Harry, jumped at the ghost's appearance.

Harry had never seen a real ghost before, so to see about twenty of them, pearly white and slightly transparent, gliding across the room was quite a shock. They appeared to be arguing. One ghost, a fat monk, was saying, "Forgive and forget, I say, we ought to give to give him a second chance."

"My dear Friar, haven't we given Peeves all the chances he deserves. He gives us all a bad name and you know, he's not really even a ghost - I say, what are you all doing here?" a ghost wearing a ruff and tights stopped talking about Peeves, whoever he was, and began focusing on the first years present.

"New Students!" said the fat monk as he smiled at the all. "About to be sorted, I suppose," a few people nodded mutely. "Hope to see you in Hufflepuff; my old house, you know."

He was interrupted by McGonagall returning. "Move along now," she said, "The Sorting Ceremony's about to start." The ghosts began fading through the opposite wall.

After the ghosts left, she turned back to the first years. "Now form a line, and follow me." Harry got into line with Neville in front of him and a black haired wizard in back, and began following McGonagall out of the chamber and through a pair of double doors into the Great Hall. As they walked to the front, Harry freely gazed around at the thousands of candles lighting the hall over the four long tables on which golden plates and goblets were laid. At the front of the hall was one long staff table, where McGonagall led them, and then stopped them so they were facing the rest of the hall.

Harry gazed out over the students, all who looked indistinguishable from where he was standing, and also saw various ghosts, shining silver among the many pale faces, sprinkled among the student population. He heard a few first years whispering about the ceiling, so he looked upwards to see what looked like a velvety black curtain splattered with blobs of white, shining light; the night sky. McGonagall had a stool in front of the first years. On top, she placed a pointed wizard's hat. It was clearly very old, as the numerous patches and dirt declared. After people stared at it for a few moments the brim finally opened. It began to sing, and Harry had to resist the urge to cover his ears; you'd think with its age, it would have refined its talent to sing. He glanced sideways to see Neville looking much more confident about the sorting now that he knew there was no real test.

After the applause died down, McGonagall stepped forward with a roll of parchment in her hand. "When I call your name, you will put on the hat and sit on the stool to be sorted," she said.

"Abbott, Hannah," she called out, and Hannah stumbled to the hat. After a moment's pause, it shouted "HUFFLEPUFF!" She walked with obvious relief to the Hufflepuff table as they clapped politely, and where the monk waved her over.

"Bones, Susan" was next, and it took the hat only seconds to shout out "HUFFLEPUFF!"

"Boot, Terry" was called next, and the hat after a few seconds said "RAVENCLAW!"

"Brocklehurst, Mandy," joined him there. "Brown, Lavender" became the first new Gryffindor. "Bulstrode, Millicent," became the first new Slytherin. The sorting continued from there, with Michael Corner,

Stephen Cornfoot, Su Li, and Anthony Goldstein heading to Ravenclaw, while Seamus Finnegan and Hermione Granger became new Gryffindors. The latter surprised Harry, considering how much she spouted of information and facts. In addition, Kevin Entwhistle, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Wayne Hopkins, and Megan Jones joined Hufflepuff, while Vincent Crabbe, Gregory Goyle, Tracey Davis, and Daphne Greengrass became the newest Slytherins. Now it was Neville's turn.

Harry gave him a reassuring clap on the shoulder as McGonagall called out "Longbottom, Neville." He rushed forward to be sorted. His sorting was the longest to date, as it took a few minutes for the hat finally to shout out "HUFFLEPUFF!"

Harry smiled reassuringly as Neville took off the hat and headed for the Hufflepuff table, sitting down next to the ghost monk. The sorting continued.

Morag McDougal became a Ravenclaw. And then the blond who'd been looking for Harry on the train, Draco Malfoy, became a Slytherin. Lily Moon joined him there; as did Theo Nott and Pansy Parkinson. Next were the Patil twins. Padma was first, and she was sorted into Ravenclaw, though Pavarti took a seat at the Gryffindor table. After her was Sally-Anne Perks, who joined the Hufflepuffs. And then, it was Harry's turn.

"Potter, Harry," McGonagall read as the four tables broke out in whispers. Harry also felt as if the staff were paying closer attention as the hat was placed on his head.

"Before we begin, and I lower my occlumency shields, I would like to state for the records that my comments about your singing were nothing personal," Harry stated in his head as he dropped the shields.

The hat chuckled. "I've gotten many comments on my singing over the years, Mr. Potter, but never an apology for it," it said with amusement. "So now to the question of the hour: where shall I sort you?"

"Well, you could sort me to the staff table," Harry quipped. "I noticed the surly chap with long hair was glaring at me for quite some time; I bet he'd be quite the conversationalist."

"I'm almost tempted to do that just to see how they'd react," the hat confessed. "However, your ancestors, specifically Godric and Rowena, would be rolling in their graves."

"Hmm, good point. Don't want to anger the ancestors, after all." Harry paused. "Let's go house by house, shall we, and then you can make a decision."

"Sounds good," the hat replied. "It's rare that anyone is able to think rationally in a situation like this," the hat pointed out.

"Quite, I'm sure. Okay, Slytherin first. I'm sure you're well aware of some of my Slytherin like qualities, and my ability to speak parseltongue. However, the problem as I see it is: I don't want to spend my next seven years politicking or looking over my shoulder for the eventual assassination attempts. While I could probably do well there, it would A. isolate me from the rest of the school, and B. ensure constant harassment from the more passionate members of that house's blood importance cult. Besides, I assure you that if killing every Slytherin who might do me harm is the way to obtain a peaceful night's sleep, then that house's population will see a sharp decline as long as I'm there. Though it will raise eyebrows when the twentieth Slytherin dies falling down a staircase. Britain doesn't need two Dark Lords on the prowl, which I believe Slytherin would force me into becoming, my good hat," Harry finished.

"Next, let's jump to Gryffindor. While I'm certain some people would say, "Your parents were there, so you should be too", I have no desire to try and mimic them. They were wonderful people, from what I've read, but I'd doubt they would want their son to imitate them, if only to have the peace of mind in knowing I don't have significant psychological problems. In addition, while I might possess some degree of the traits of bravery, chivalry, and recklessness; two out of three of them I have been trying to curb for the last month, if only so I don't find myself thinking with my fists instead of my brain. Finally, I also want to possibly make some friends in Slytherin, and the stigma of being a Gryffindor, "just like his father," will prevent me from doing that," Harry stated.

"So that leaves the two houses I would prefer to go into: Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw. I don't have a real preference either way. I mean, I think I possess adequate degrees of a desire to learn, loyalty, a

willingness to work hard, and intelligence. I know good people in both houses. The only tipping of the scale occurs in that I'm probably going to spend a lot of time studying, if only so I don't die when Voldemort returns. So I guess when it comes down to it: I'd like to be in Ravenclaw," Harry finished.

"Well that is a very interesting argument. I will take Slytherin and Gryffindor off the table seeing as you're so opposed," the hat said.

"Oh, I am- I think my time could be better spent elsewhere," Harry replied.

"I am going to have to get Fawkes, he's the headmaster's phoenix, to help me visit you occasionally. I haven't had good conversation in ages," the hat declared.

"From the way you're talking, It sounds like the last conversationalist you met was Nicolas Flamel," Harry joked.

"Funny enough, it was. People have been much more timid these last six-hundred and fifty years or so. Or they know what they want and aren't willing to indulge me. I miss the days when Godric, or Rowena, or even Salazar would pull me aside for a long conversation, though you have to understand that in those days many conversations involved large amounts of mead and profanity, as well as many half-baked ideas and humorous drinking stories," the hat said wistfully.

"If Fawkes is willing, I'd be happy to have you as a companion. You could probably point out the many idiotic things I'm going to do while I try and learn how to not get myself killed in combat with a Dark Lord," Harry said.

"Thanks, I'm honored. Sitting on the headmaster's shelf three-hundred and sixty four days of the year, with only a phoenix for company, who I can't even understand, is rather dull," the hat replied.

"Before we get back to the Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw question, can I ask you something?" the hat mentally nodded. "Is Ollivander correct about the secret room on the seventh floor?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure many students over the years have found the delights of that room. If you want to practice dueling, that room should completely serve you needs," the hat answered.

"Thanks, anyway, not to rush you, you do have an important job after all, but it has been nearly ten minutes, and people are starting to get antsy," Harry pointed out.

"Oh, yes, ah, where was I? Ehem, yes: Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw. I think you'd do better in "RAVENCLAW!" the hat shouted to the hall. "Lots more study time."

"It's been a pleasure, hat. I'll see you later," Harry said as he got up.

"Oh yes, for future reference, its Alistair," the hat replied as Harry took it off and set it back on the stool. He began walking to the Ravenclaw table as he received the loudest applause of all the first years. He sat down with the other first years next to Anthony.

"What kept you," he asked.

Harry shrugged. "Alistair's a good conversationalist." He saw Anthony's look. "The hat," he amended. "He recollects the days when he used to listen to Godric Gryffindor's drinking stories."

"Where'd it want to sort you?" asked Anthony.

"I took control. Told him right off the bat I didn't want to be in Gryffindor or Slytherin; that I'd prefer Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw," Harry replied. "We eventually got around to him deciding Ravenclaw was better."

"How do you speak with a hat for ten minutes?" Terry Boot, who sat across from Harry, asked.

"Put it this way; Alistair said the last good conversation he'd had was with Nicolas Flamel in the 1340's. Everyone else since was either too timid about their sorting, or too determined about what house they wanted to be in, for him to strike up a good conversation. And he mentioned that he sits on a shelf in the headmaster's office for the rest of the year. I'm surprised he hasn't made every sorting take twenty minutes if he has to live like a hermit for the rest of the year," Harry finished.

He turned back to the sorting as the various applause and cheers he'd received finally died down. Dean Thomas was next, and became a Gryffindor. Lisa Turpin joined the claws; she sat down next to Harry. Ronald Weasley went to Gryffindor. And finally, Blaise Zabini finished the sorting ceremony by becoming a Slytherin.

Albus Dumbledore had gotten to his feet. He was beaming at the students with his arms opened wide. "Welcome," he said. "Welcome to a new year at Hogwarts! Before we begin our banquet, I would like to say a few words. And here they are: Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak! Thank you!"

There was a round of enthusiastic applause as food appeared on the plates

Harry piled food onto his plate. An older blonde-haired girl, sitting a little ways down from them, turned to the first years. "All right, it's introduction time. I'm Penelope Clearwater, one of the fifth year prefects. The other one, Michael Kensing, is down at the other end," she said gesturing to an older boy with wavy brown hair. She stared at the first years.

Lisa cracked first, "I'm Lisa Turpin," the blonde said in a rush.

Penelope stared at Harry who was right next to her. He stared back. Finally she sighed and said, "Please introduce yourself."

Harry cracked a grin. "All you had to do was ask." He turned to the other first years. "Harry Potter."

"Anthony Goldstein," came from his left. Padma Patil, Michael Corner, Stephen Cornfoot, Terry Boot, Morag McDougal, and Su Li also introduced themselves in turn.

"Now then, some things you should know. That," she gestured at the ghost near the end of the table, "Is the Ravenclaw ghost the Gray Lady." Harry idly looked at her, and had to contain a gasp. There was one memory, a rather fuzzy one he'd inherited from Voldemort, where she revealed who she had been; Helena Ravenclaw. That meant she was a very distant relation of his, but a relation none-the less. Penelope was speaking again. "When we arrive at Ravenclaw

tower, there will be a kind of first year orientation. That's all you need to know for now."

Harry listened in as the Ravenclaw first years idly chatted about childhoods and families with a sense of mournfulness. His dark thoughts were interrupted by dinner being cleared away and being replaced by desserts.

"So what are our classes?" Lisa asked Penelope.

"Well, there is transfiguration, taught by McGonagall, History of Magic, taught by this boring ghost Binns, Potions, taught by Snape, he's a really difficult person, Herbology with Sprout, Astronomy with Sinistra, and Charms, with our head of house Flitwick. Oh, and Defense Against the Dark Arts; that position gets a new person every year. I think this year they brought back the former Muggle Studies professor: Quirrell," Penelope answered.

"Ooh, what's Transfiguration like?" Padma asked.

"It's about changing things into other things. You start small with matchsticks into needles, and then you progress to bigger and more intricate things," Penelope finished.

"Really useful in a duel if you can use it right," Harry commented as he grabbed a treacle tart.

Penelope looked at him oddly. "Any other questions?"

"Yes, what are we going to be doing in Defense Against the Dark Arts?" asked Terry.

"It varies from year to year because there's always a new professor. You'll probably be studying simple dark creatures and maybe a protective hex or two," she answered.

"And charms?" asked Stephen.

"You'll be learning simple things, like the lighting charm, and the levitation charm," Penelope replied. "Please save any further questions until our orientation tonight; I feel it will answer them all."

Anthony leaned closer to Harry. "What was that about Transfiguration and dueling?" he mumbled

Harry shrugged and whispered back. "From what I understand, the ability to conjure, vanish, and change things like rocks and pebbles into wolves and bears that you can send at your opponent makes Transfiguration very handy in battle."

"You want to be a professional duelist, Harry?" Anthony asked as he took a piece of fudge.

"Just keeping my options open, Anthony," Harry replied.

At last, the desserts too disappeared, and Professor Dumbledore got to his feet again. The hall fell silent. "Ahem - just a few more words now that we are all fed and watered. I have a few start-of-term notices to give you. First years should note that the forest on the grounds is forbidden to all pupils. And a few of our older students would do well to remember that as well." Dumbledore's twinkling eyes flashed in the direction of the Weasley twins. "I have also been asked by Mr. Filch, the caretaker, to remind you all that no magic should be used between classes in the corridors. Quidditch trials will be held in the second week of the term. Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact Madam Hooch. And finally, I must tell you that this year; the third-floor corridor on the right-hand side is out of bounds to everyone who does not wish to die a very painful death."

Harry laughed, but he was one of the few who did. It was then that he realized the crazy old man was actually serious, and his thoughts turned cold as he realized what Dumbledore had really just said: "I have something extremely dangerous in the school, so please avoid it." The old man really was insane. And Harry's thoughts about insanity and unnatural interest in his person kept him pre-occupied all through the singing of the school song. He finally regained his focus when Penelope shouted for all the Ravenclaw first years to gather around her.

Once they had all arrived, she led them out of the Great Hall and towards Ravenclaw tower. The other first years were very sleepy and unfocused, but Harry was determined to remember the way they traveled to get to breakfast tomorrow morning. He noticed that Hogwarts made finding a landmark to determine if you were on the

right path impossible, with all the movement from paintings and suits of armor. Finally, she stopped in front of a door with no keyhole but a bronze knocker in the shape of an eagle. Penelope knocked once, and the mouth of the eagle opened.

"What always runs but never walks, often murmurs but never talks, has a bed but never sleeps, has a mouth but never eats?" asked the musical voice that came from the eagle knocker.

"To access Ravenclaw tower, you must knock and then answer a riddle. If you don't get it, you must either try until you get it, or wait for someone else to come along," Penelope explained. "Anyone have a guess."

Harry shrugged. "A river," he spoke to the eagle.

"Correct," said the same musical voice as the door opened, and they all crowded in.

Bookcases lined the walls, except for where windows were placed and one long stretch where there was a fireplace. The ceiling was painted with stars of all different shapes and colors, while the window curtains were woven with bronze and blue material. Tables, chairs, and couches decorated the room, and right next to the door was a white-marble statue of a graceful looking woman; Rowena Ravenclaw as Harry knew from his books. Penelope had all the first years take seats around the fire.

"Now then," she beckoned to Kensing who had just joined her, "This is Michael Kensing, the other fifth year prefect, and he will handle the orientation. Michael?"

He cleared his throat nervously. "Welcome to Ravenclaw, the home of the intelligent and witty. I hope that can all contribute to winning the house cup this year. Now then, a few things you need to know. Every Thursday, there is a mandatory study group meeting for all first year Ravenclaws. Come with questions about whatever subject, or subjects, you are having trouble in. Penelope mentioned what classes were like?" they nodded. "Even though it's a while away, I'm going to mention the electives you can take come third year. Now then in your third year, you can take, up to a maximum of three, Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Care of Magical Creatures, Divination, and Muggle Studies. Arithmancy deals with breaking down spells

into a numbered sequence, Runes deals with deciphering ancient magical runes, COMC deals with learning about and being introduced to magical creatures, divination deals with predicting the future, and muggle studies is learning about how muggles live."

"Moving on, breakfast starts at 6 in the morning, and goes to 8:30. Classes start at 9:00 depending on your schedule. There is generally a fifteen minute break in between classes. Lunch is at 12:30. Dinner is at 6:30. At breakfast tomorrow around 8, your head of house, in this case professor Flitwick, will come around with your schedules, and also tell you when you have a meeting with him. Every first year has a periodic meeting with Flitwick once a term that lasts about fifteen minutes or so. Later years have a once-a-year meeting with him." He looked at Penelope. "Can you think of anything else?"

"Yes, the library is open from nine in the morning to midnight. If you want to take a book out of the restricted section, you must get a teachers signed permission. I think that's everything," she said.

"All right, then have a nice night firsties. See you around," he said as he and Penelope walked off. "Oh," he pointed to the staircases. "Up the staircases to the doors marked 'first years', girls on the left and boys on the right, you will find your trunks and beds. Night."

Harry and the other first year boys walked up the staircase until they found the door marked "first years." The room had five four-poster beds all decorated in blue and gold, the colors of Ravenclaw. Harry quickly got ready for bed. A few minutes later, he was under the covers of his bed, sound asleep.

Chapter Six: The Start of A Beautiful Education

Harry was up by 6:30 the next morning. He was dressed and ready to leave a quarter to seven, while the other boys were still asleep. Not that he was a morning person, of course, but still, he had a lot to do today.

He quietly walked back through the Ravenclaw common room, out of the door, and began journeying through the maze of corridors towards the Great Hall. Remembering the way they had taken last night was difficult, especially seeing as his hunch had been right and the portraits and suits of armor could, and did, move. Still, twenty minutes later, he was sitting at the end of the Ravenclaw table eating breakfast. None of the other first years were there yet. Harry ate a filling breakfast of pancakes, cereal, some fruit, and bacon, while watching the Hall fill up. Professor fFlitwick came over to him just as he was finishing his cereal.

"Good morning, Mr. Potter. I must say, it's a pleasure to have you in my house. How I wished your mother could have been sorted here," he said wistfully. He cleared his throat. "Anyway, here is your class schedule. Also, as I'm sure you were told, I meet twice a year with every first year, in the order of when they come down for breakfast. So I will meet with you on September 22, at 11:30, which should give you enough time to become acclimated with your classes. Have a good morning, Mr. Potter."

Harry looked down at his schedule. He had history of magic first thing this morning. If what Ollivander told him was true, then he was going to have to do a lot of self study in that class because listening to the lecture was almost impossible. On the other hand, he could put that time to use with a good book on dueling. He looked at his schedule again. The rest of his morning was free, and then he had herbology with the Slytherins that afternoon, and an astronomy lesson that evening.

He pocketed his schedule and began making his way back to Ravenclaw tower. Fifteen minutes later, he walked in through the door after solving the riddle, and walked to his dormitory to retrieve his books. The other first year boys were still asleep. Harry sighed, and after retrieving his books plus a few on dueling and transfiguration he slipped into his bag, began going from bed to bed to shake the other Ravenclaws awake.

"What gives?" mumbled Anthony.

"Anthony, it's nearly eight. I just got back from breakfast. We have classes in an hour," Harry replied. Anthony's eyes opened wide, and he scrambled to his trunk to get clothes for the day. Harry sighed and moved onto Terry's bed. It was a thankless job waking them up, but Harry knew they'd be grateful later.

After all of the other boys had been woken up, Harry departed the dormitory with his bag in hand. In the commons, the first year girls had gathered.

"M-morning Harry," yawned Padma Patil. "Do you know the way to the Great Hall?"

"Yes, if you go out..." he gave them the best directions he could; he still wasn't sure of the way. "I'll see you in History of Magic, Padma." He said as he left the tower.

He had no clue where the classroom was, but he began walking around the castle. His schedule mentioned it was on the third floor, so he began descending staircases until he was sure he was standing on the third floor. Then he began wandering around, hoping to come across the classroom. Finally, right before the bell was about to go off, he found the classroom, and took a seat in the back. He pulled out his history of magic textbook, some parchment and quills, and one of the dueling books he'd brought with him, Simple Spells Every Duelist Needs To Know by Gregory Finch. Harry learned from the cover that Finch had been an 18th century auror and dueling champion.

He began reading about the most basic tools anyone calling themselves a duelist needed to have perfected in his repertoire. The first section, on the summoning charm, he barely skimmed. The second section was on the banishing charm. Harry read a brief description of the charm. Now here was something that could be useful. He skipped over the charm's origin, and progressed to the how to section. Realizing he couldn't practice yet, he folded the page over, and moved on. By now, most of the Ravenclaws had arrived, and Binns had been lecturing for the past five minutes, while Harry pretending to read along.

He was about to move onto the stunning spell's biography and description, when a page at the end of the banishing charm section caught his eye. He scanned the paragraph.

"The reason summoning and banishing charms are so critical to the aspiring duelist is because of the environment properties of the dueling field. Even though dueling platforms are clear of all debris and impediments at a duel's start, it quickly becomes littered with rubbish; generally smashed walls and mutilated animals. Any self-respecting duelist knows the value of using this debris to either shield oneself from attack, or sending it flying at an opponent forcing them on defense. Unless the opponent is a Legilimens of uncharacteristic ability, and/or you are a person with no rudimentary occlumency shields, then when you move to use the debris for either purpose, there will be a split second where the opponent will be unsure, in most cases, whether they are going to have to defend themselves, or whether to alter their attack strategy. In this way, what I term as the property of dueling mobility, the use of summoning and banishing charms, is critical in a drawn-out duel, and doubly important in an unconventional arena- be it a castle or a forest where many different objects are littered around."

Harry blinked and reread the paragraph. Duelist mobility? Well it sounded rational, and useful. He would definitely have to put in some time on the banishing charm. He was about to move onto the stunning charm when there was a sharp poke to his shoulder.

"What are you reading?" asked Anthony who was in the seat next to him. Harry held up the cover. "I've never seen that book before." He gestured to Binns. "Wake me when class is over?"

Harry nodded and went back to reading. By the time class had ended, he had skimmed through the stunning spell, the blasting curse, the conjunctivitis curse, the severing charm, the hurling hex, the bombarding hex, and the disarming charm. The book was a goldmine on spells any wizard should have at their disposal.

With a free period, Harry quickly slipped away from the group of Ravenclaws who were grumbling about the homework Harry had made sure to copy down. He began ascending staircases, headed for the room of requirements. Once he saw the tapestry Ollivander had pointed out, he paced back and forth in front of it while thinking, "I need a place to practice dueling."

On his third pass, a door appeared in what had been solid wall. Harry opened it and stepped inside. It was a large room with several dummies situated against the wall, and various books and items strewn around the room that Harry didn't know how to use. Harry went through his bag and pulled out the Finch book, and flipped back to the banishing charm section. He practiced the wand movements a few times, and when he felt confident enough, he stood and attempted to cast the charm. "Depulso," he said as he aimed the spell at a nearby dummy. Nothing happened. Harry reread the wand movements, and then tried again. This time, there was a small amount of movement backwards.

Harry continually tried to get the charm working, with limited success. By lunchtime, he'd managed to consistently knock the dummy backwards. He left the room and began heading towards lunch.

He must have taken a wrong turn somewhere, because he was standing in front of a statue of a humpbacked witch, with no idea where he was or how he'd even managed to get here. He began looking around helplessly for anyone to ask directions from, but all the portraits in this area were absent. He was considering picking a direction and walking when he saw the ghost of the Grey Lady floating by.

"Helena!" he shouted to get her attention. She whipped around so fast that Harry knew if she were still living she would have dislodged her neck.

"What did you call me?" she asked in a deathly whisper.

"Helena," answered Harry. "We're distantly related, as Rowena was my however-many-greats grandmother."

"How did you know of me?" she asked disparagingly.

"I ran across an old account of you," Harry answered vaguely. "Listen, do you know the way to the Great Hall?"

"We shall never speak of this!" she angrily replied as she floated away.

Harry stared at the spot where she vanished. "Thank you so much for your help! And Rowena said 'Claws looked out for each other'!" He walked away muttering about nutty ghosts.

He was still lost when a water balloon narrowly missed his ear. "Well, well, if it isn't potty wee Potter!" cackled a little man floating in midair that Harry just noticed. He had wicked, dark eyes and an abnormally wide mouth.

"What can I do for you?" asked Harry as he wandlessly summoned the water balloons the ghost was holding.

He stared. "How did you do that, firstie?" he demanded harshly.

Harry shrugged. "I practiced. Anyway, I don't suppose you'd know the way to the Great Hall."

The man adopted a gentlemanly visage. "Oh, well if you go down this hall, turn right, walk about five minutes, and open the door at the end, it should lead you right to the entrance."

Harry smiled. "Excellent. Thanks," he said as he walked off to follow the man's directions.

Fifteen minutes later, he was standing in front of the door he had been directed to. Except it was locked. Before he could decide on another course of action, someone shouted at him.

"Hey, what the bloody 'ell do you think you're doing! I ought to put you in detention for the rest of the month," said an old man accompanied by a white cat.

Harry stared at him. "I'm sorry, what?"

"You were trying to access the forbidden corridor," the man declared hotly.

"I'm sorry Mr.... was it Filch?" He nodded. "I was told by a floating man a few corridors back that this was the way to the Great Hall."

"Why did you follow his directions?" Filch snarled.

"I shouldn't have?" Harry asked confused. "He told me that through this door was a passage to the entrance hall."

"Well it's not," he said. "That little blighter is Peeves, the castle poltergeist, and I ought to give you detention for being fool enough to follow his directions. Get out of my sight!"

Harry considered asking directions from the caretaker, but decided that spending more time with the grouchy old man and his apparently evil cat was not worth it. So Harry walked off trying yet again to find his way.

After a few more minutes of futile walking he came across another ghost, this time dressed in ruff and tights. He thought he'd seen this ghost yesterday before the sorting. "Excuse me!" he called out to the ghost.

It turned and floated towards him. "Ah, Harry Potter," he said genially. "It is a pleasure to meet you. I am Sir Nicholas de Mimsy-Porpington, the ghost of Gryffindor tower; at your service."

"Pleased to meet you Sir Nicolas. I was wondering if you could possibly direct me to the Great Hall?" Harry asked desperately.

"Gotten a bit lost, have we?" he asked kindly. "Certainly, follow me."

Harry began following Nicolas through the maze of corridors, who also took the initiative in pointing out locations of interest, like the transfiguration and DADA classrooms. "So, Harry, I must admit I was, as was professor McGonagall, a bit surprised by your sorting in both its length and outcome," he remarked.

"I did not want to be in Gryffindor because I wanted to study a lot and possibly make some friends in Slytherin," Harry replied honestly.

"I see you intend to do Rowena proud," he remarked.

"Say, Sir Nicolas; were you a wizard before you died?" Harry asked out of curiosity.

"Indeed I was, though I was executed when the king of Brittany became convinced I was conspiring against him and had me executed. Apparition had not yet been invented, and I was rather

hopeless with wandless magic. Thus I was unable to escape my beheading. Which wasn't even done right; I'm only partially beheaded for all eternity!" he complained.

"Wait, the Slytherin ghost, the bloody something; he has a sword, right? Why don't you just ask him to finish the job?" Harry suggested.

Sir Nicolas laughed bitterly. "The bloody baron is a self-serving fool whose only usefulness is reigning in that pest of a poltergeist," he declared hotly.

"Well then he needs to do a better job reigning him in," mumbled Harry. "I'll talk to him and get him to finish the beheading," Harry promised.

Sir Nicolas chuckled. "I am touched, Harry, but how exactly do you propose to make him do as you wish?"

"Blackmail?" Harry suggested.

Sir Nicolas turned around and stared at him. "What could you possibly have on the baron?" he asked slowly.

Harry smiled mischievously. "He was Sir Walter Rigby, baron of Kendal in life, wasn't he?"

"I almost hesitate to ask how you know that?" said Sir Nicolas.

"The same way I know who the Grey Lady was in life," Harry airily replied.

Nicolas was silent as he finished leading Harry to the Great Hall. Harry felt lucky that lunch hadn't ended yet. However, before he dug in, he had a favorite to repay. He walked up to where the Slytherin ghost was sitting. "A word, Sir Rigby?"

The ghost whipped around as fast as the Grey Lady had. Harry briefly registered his blank eyes and gaunt face before he noticed the large silver bloodstain on his robes. "Speak, whelp!" he snarled.

"Now, now were these the manners you showed Helena?" asked Harry.

The baron's aggressive posture faded immediately. "What do you want?" he asked tiredly.

"Sir Nicolas needs use of your sword to properly remove his head," Harry replied.

"I will lend him my sword. If you ever—" the ghost started to threaten.

Harry cut him off. "Wow, Helena said something similar not a half-hour ago. Great minds do think alike. My silence for your sword." The baron nodded grudgingly and Harry strolled away without registering the contemplative looks on the upper years Slytherins faces who had been sitting nearby.

Harry plopped down next to Anthony. "Harry, where did you get to?" he asked.

Harry casually shrugged as he began piling food onto his plate. "I got lost and met two ghosts, a poltergeist, and the castle caretaker."

Anthony accepted the explanation as typical of Harry as he began eating. He was really hungry from all the magic he had to use. It was something he'd learned from practicing magic in the Alley; after performing large amounts of magic, he needed large amounts of food.

Herbology and Astronomy were uneventful, with both teachers having an introductory class. Harry used the time between his classes to start his history of magic and herbology essays, and to put in some more practice on his banisher. Walking across the castle to the room of requirements just to practice it was inconvenient, so Harry used a nearby unoccupied classroom.

The next day was Transfiguration in the morning and Charms in the afternoon. Harry was the first into Transfiguration, where a cat was sitting on a desk. Harry chuckled after Ollivander had pointed out McGonagall's name on the animagus registration list. Harry had sent out his registration paperwork to the International Confederation of Warlocks, after Ollivander told him almost no one checked those records, and yet it was a legal alternative. Since he had twenty minutes free before the start of class, he pulled out the Finch book and began marking down useful spells in battle from the short description.

He had finished running through his list of spells that consisted of the vanishing spell, the hurling hex, the heatless blasting curse, the extinguishing spell, espiskey- the minor wound healing charm, finite incantatum, the flame-freezing charm, the glacius charm- used to freeze things, Homenum Revelio- the presence revealer, the freezing charm, the impediment jinx, the impervious charm, aqua erecto and aguamenti- water torrent conjurations, the binding spell, the burning hex, the fireball conjuration, the leg-locker curse, the body-bind curse, the animation charm, the reductor curse, the releasing charm, the stunning spell counter, the silencing charm, the stinging hex, and the wind blast charm, as spells he wanted to learn over the next few years when another student arrived. She was a Gryffindor with long bushy hair that Harry thought he'd recognized as Hermione something from Diagon Alley. She sat down in the front, and made no attempt to engage him in conversation, so Harry went back to studying.

Five minutes later, Anthony plopped down next to him. He glanced at Harry's list of spells. "You're really trying to learn how to duel?" Anthony asked.

"I thought we'd already had this conversation, Anthony. I'm not trying; I'm succeeding," Harry replied smartly.

"You know all of those spells are way above your level," he commented.

"Something to work towards," Harry replied offhandedly. He wasn't about to tell Anthony about some of the magical power he'd gained from Voldemort or from hard work with Ollivander. He wasn't about to tell him that his magical power was currently at a Hogwarts graduates level. And he certainly wasn't about to tell him he'd likely grow many times more magically powerful over the years. All of these spells were within his reach to learn as long as he practiced a lot and constantly worked with them. Harry estimated that if he worked really hard, he could know all of these spells by the end of the year.

He was drawn out of his musings by Padma sitting down on his other side and Lisa Turpin taking the last seat. He caught Lisa's eye and she blushed and looked away. Great, a fangirl...

McGonagall chose that moment to resume her human form. Everyone else looked impressed, and seemed even more so when she changed her desk into a pig. She then began lecturing, first about class conduct, and then about the basic principles of Transfiguration. Finally, after an hour of talking, she passed out matchsticks and told everyone to turn them into needles.

After a month of reading his father's tips on Transfiguration and practicing a branch of it that required a lot more magical output and precision, this was a cakewalk for Harry. He whipped out his wand, summoned his magic, and partially turned his matchstick into a needle. It still looked to be mostly wooden. Harry summoned his energy again, and completed the transfiguration.

"Marvelous, Mr. Potter. Fifteen points to Ravenclaw for achieving the days Transfiguration. Please move on to turning your needle back into a matchstick," McGonagall said as she passed by. Harry missed Hermione's glowering look as he set to work reversing his transfiguration. By the end of class, Harry had returned it to matchstick form, and then worked on going from matchstick to needle to matchstick about ten times. "Well done, Mr. Potter. Take an additional ten points for Ravenclaw. You are as good as your father was."

"Thank you professor," said Harry idly as he began gathering his books. He still didn't see Hermione's withering look. He also didn't see the flash of annoyance of McGonagall's face. Even if he had, he wouldn't have cared that she wanted to talk more about his parents. He walked out of the classroom intent on finding an empty classroom and getting in some spell practice.

He had really gotten his banisher down, to the point where he was even able to cast it non-verbally. He decided as he gathered his things that after a little review next time, he would move on, perhaps to the hurling hex or the blasting curse; something he could use offensively. He found it much easier to get to lunch.

He was in the middle of his meal when someone poked him on the shoulder. He turned sharply to see a familiar blonde flanked by two gorillas. "Can I help you gentlemen?"

"Hello Harry Potter. We haven't been properly introduced. I am Draco Malfoy, and this is Crabbe and Goyle. I just wanted to come

over and offer to help you on your way through the wizarding world," he said. If Harry hadn't known otherwise, he almost would have believed him.

"I'm sorry Mr. Malfoy, but I do not believe I am in the position where any such help would be to my advantage," he said politely. "Thank you for the offer though."

Harry turned back to his meal, only to have his shoulder poked again. "I'd be careful if I were you, Potter. The riffraff seem to be rubbing off on you."

"I could say the same to you and your manners, Mr. Malfoy," Harry replied. "I mean, are these really the manners you were taught? You barge up to an unfamiliar person, interrupt his meal, make an outrageous proposal which basically wastes his time, and then have the nerve to be offended when said person politely rejects your proposal?"

He went red. He beckoned his two henchmen to follow him, and Harry turned back his lunch. He had just polished off his plate when there was another poke to his shoulder. He turned to see Hermione... Granger? It was Granger right? Anyway, she was scowling at him.

"What can I do for you, Hermione?" he asked politely.

"How did you do that?" she snarled.

"Do what?" asked Harry confused. Was she really on about him doing better in class?

"How did you transfigure your matchstick faster than I did?" she demanded.

Harry opened his mouth in shock. "You're really letting this bother you?" he asked incredulously. "Why does it seem so bloody unlikely that someone might be better at something than you are?"

She huffed and walked away. Harry reflected on the amount of crazies that seemed to flock to him and wondered if someone hadn't put a curse on him to that end.

He had charms right after lunch, so after a filling meal, he left for the classroom. This class was actually easy to find. And it was an easy day's work. His only problem was that this class was again with the Gryffindors. So after professor Flitwick completed introductions and the days lecture, and they had started on the lighting charm, once Harry had gotten it working after a few, he caught Hermione gritting her teeth and snarling in his direction.

After class, Harry headed back to Ravenclaw tower. He wanted to get through all his homework- his transfiguration essay, history of magic paper, herbology paper, astronomy essay, and charms paper-before he got back to spell practice. By dinnertime, he had finished up all of his outstanding papers. Tomorrow started the weekend which gave him lots of time for spell practice.

Over the weekend, he perfected the banishing charm, stunning spell, the flinging hex, the knock-back curse, and the bombarding hex, verbally and non-verbally, and had also perfected, much to his shock, the blasting curse. He thought learning that curse would take much longer. He also perfected the verbal use of the hurling hex, though non-verbal was still a challenge.

Monday he had Defense Against the Dark Arts, potions, and his second astronomy lesson. DADA was fine, except for the fact that he felt a few legilimency probes from Quirrell. After a few initial probes he stopped, and Harry wrote it off as his checking the class. The lesson was rather boring, as Quirrell's stutter made him nearly impossible to understand. Harry was also very disappointed when the professor announced that basic defense spells were going to be the last thing covered before final exams; until then they were going to be studying dark creatures.

After lunch, and a little more practice on the hurling hex, Harry and the other first year Ravenclaws found themselves standing in front of the potions classroom with the first year Hufflepuffs. While they were waiting, Harry walked over to Neville who was facing away from him.

"How's Hufflepuff?" he said with a friendly pat on the shoulder.

Neville turned and smiled at Harry. "I'm doing great, Harry. You were right; Hufflepuff is the house for me. How've you been?"

"I'm doing well, Neville. I've been—" But Harry was interrupted by the slamming of a door. He turned to see the greasy haired fellow from the sorting, professor Snape, scowling... at him! What had he done?

"Inside," he said dangerously. Harry calmly walked in, determined to not be intimidated by the bat. He sat down at a table with Neville, Anthony, and Terry. Snape walked to the front of the room. He began taking roll call and when he got to Harry's name, he paused. "Ah, Yes," he said softly, "Harry Potter. Our new... celebrity." Harry was certain he heard snickering from a Hufflepuff a few tables down, something Hopkins. After he finished calling names, he stared at the class.

"You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potionmaking," he began. He spoke in barely more than a whisper. "As there is little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death - if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach," he finished, the certainty that they were dunderheads was evident in his tone.

"Potter!" said Snape suddenly. "What would I get if I added powdered root of asphodel to an infusion of wormwood?"

Harry stared at him. "You're asking me a question from the sixth year potions syllabus?" He said incredulously.

"You will address me as sir," He whispered dangerously, "Ten points from Gryffindor and I see fame clearly isn't everything."

"Like hell I will!" Harry declared. "Fuck You! Are you so blind that you haven't noticed my gold and blue robes! If You asked me a sixth year question, and didn't expect me to know it made the Draught of Living Death so you could humiliate me. I guess my father's account of you was much more accurate than my mother's... Snivellus."

Snape had gone dangerously pale, and he angrily strode forward and stuck his wand at Harry's throat. "Say that again," he whispered.

Harry wandlessly summoned his wand, and intoned "Flipendo," in his head. Snape was flung back into the wall, and his impact smashed several jars. Snape pushed against the wall, and sent a burst of spellfire from his wand. Harry threw himself out of the way as the curses shattered several potion's vials and flasks, and recognizing that Snape had upped the ante, sent back a banishing spell and a blasting curse. Snape flung himself out of the way, but the blasting curse created an explosion that knocked him off his feet and slammed his head into a desk. His wand idly dropped to the floor.

Harry turned to survey the damage. The rest of the class was sitting there in shock; thankfully none of them were injured, around several pieces of shattered glass. Harry was still breathing hard. "Well, that was fun," he commented airily. No one said anything. "Someone go get Madam Pomphrey. Maybe the Headmaster too while you're at it." He looked at Neville. "So as I was saying, I've been practicing how to duel."

Twenty minutes later Madam Pomphrey, professor McGonagall, and Headmaster Dumbledore were on the scene. After hearing students' accounts and Snape had been healed, Dumbledore turned to Harry with his best disappointed face. "Harry, please explain what happened here," he commanded sadly.

"Well, it's quite simple, sir. I came in today for my first potions lesson. After Snape ordered us inside, he took roll call, only pausing to make a snide comment about me being a celebrity. After he gave us a long monologue of the beauty of potions, he turned to me and asked me what would happen if powdered root of asphodel was combined with an infusion of wormwood. Now that answer is in One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi, however it is in the sixth year section of the book. I did read that far, but when he asked me, I was certain he made a mistake. So I asked him if he realized it was from the sixth year potions syllabus. Instead of responding, he told me to address him as sir and took ten points from Gryffindor. So I called him out. I explained that I did know, but I wasn't answering the question on principle, and then I commented that my father's description was much more accurate than my mother's. That was when he put his wand to my throat." McGonagall and Pomphrey gasped. "Luckily, I had been practicing some defensive aspects of magic, so I wandlessly summoned my wand, and used the knock-back hex to get him off of me. He started firing curses at me, so I

moved out of the way, and then, reluctantly, sent a banisher and a blasting curse at him. He dove out of the way, got caught in the blasting curse's impact, lost his balance, and was knocked out when his head collided with the desk. Then I sent some students to come get you three. And here we are."

"He attacked you!" McGonagall whispered in horror.

"Yes, he put his wand to my throat. Then, when I was forced to push him off, he started flinging hexes at me, and I was worried he would hit one of the other students. So I was forced to try and subdue him, though I would have loved to have gotten a teacher," Harry added helpfully.

"Harry, I am very disappointed in you for trying to blame everything on professor Snape," Dumbledore said sternly.

"Headmaster, I will match you disappointment for disappointment and come out way ahead every time. Why was I attacked by a potions professor who avoided Azkaban at your behest? Does that mean you're trying to kill me?" Harry asked accusingly.

"Don't you think that is an unreasonable assumption, Mr. Potter?" said Madam Pomphrey evenly as she examined him.

"I was just attacked by the potions professor. Please excuse my paranoia," Harry remarked dryly.

Madam Pomphrey had just finished working on Snape, and his head rose. He looked around wildly, and then his eyes locked onto Harry. He smirked triumphantly. "Headmaster, I demand that brat be expelled!" he shouted as he pointed at Harry.

"What happened, Severus?" Dumbledore asked gently.

"The Brat attacked me!" Snape shouted.

"Why would he do that?" Dumbledore replied.

"I don't know; he's Potter's hellspawn!" he replied sarcastically.

"Did it have anything to do with your wand being at his throat?" Dumbledore asked accusingly.

"Does that matter?" Snape spat. "He provoked me! And then he attacked me!" he smiled manically. "I demand he be expelled!"

"How did he provoke you?" Dumbledore continued.

"He said his father's recollection of me seemed much more accurate than his mother's earlier recollection," he replied offhandedly. He looked at Dumbledore quizzically. "Aren't you going to expel him?"

Harry looked around and noticed that Pomphrey was being forced to restrain McGonagall, who'd drawn her wand. The other students were looking at Snape like he was vermin. And Dumbledore looked old and weathered, and a look of sorrow appeared on his face as he glanced at Harry, and then turned back to Snape.

"Severus!" he barked. "You attacked a student!" he took a breath. "I have always been your biggest advocate. But this crosses a line I can't overlook." He took another breath. "Pack your bags," he whispered.

"WHAT!" Snape roared.

"Pack your bags, Severus! I can't allow such abuses to continue," he replied evenly.

"Headmaster?" Snape questioned.

"NOW!" Dumbledore yelled. Snape yelped and began summoning his things. "I will walk you to the gates," he said calmly. A minute later, Dumbledore led Snape out of the room, while the rest of the class looked on like deer in the headlights.

"What will we do for a potions professor?" asked Pomphrey worriedly.

"Well," both professors and many of the students turned to Harry, "I still remember reading about professor... Slughorn, was it? Yes, Slughorn, from the seventies, who was a very good potions professor despite his many flaws."

"Horace Slughorn," McGonagall muttered. "Yes, he was a good professor, and a good colleague, though, as you said, with many

flaws." She straightened up. "Mr. Potter, you might not be aware, but former professor Slughorn was very much enamored with the possibility of forging certain connections," a look of distaste flashed across her face, "And deriving benefits from those connections at a later date. As such, since you are responsible for us not having a potions professor, your punishment will be to help convince Horace to retake the job."

"Where is he located, professor?" Harry asked eagerly.

She looked at him in surprise.

"He has a cottage on the outskirts of Cardiff, at 23 Finch Lane," McGonagall replied. "Thankfully, being Deputy Headmistress means I am in charge of keeping in contact with former staff. I will have a portkey for you to take there in an hour." She and Pomphrey left the room.

Harry turned to the rest of the students. "That was a blast," there were a few chuckles. "Hey we all heard how awful a teacher he was. I know Slughorn will be much better. So Ravens, now we get to learn potions, not get snarled at. And 'Puffs, well did he seem like a fair teacher to you?" They shook their heads. "So, let's call this potions lesson a wash, and when we meet next week, we'll have Slughorn here who will be an infinitely better teacher. All you had to do for seven years of a better potions class was endure an hour of being uncomfortable. I have to do all the hard work." They all cheered and Harry led them out of the room, Neville and Anthony flanking his sides.

They arrived in the Great Hall in high spirits, where the Hufflepuffs broke off to head to their own house, and the Ravens stayed with Harry. They headed to the Ravenclaw common room, where as Harry expected, professor Flitwick was waiting for him.

"Hello, Mr. Potter. I think now would be the time to have a quick chat," he said neutrally. Harry shrugged and began following him. After a few minutes of walking, the professor led him into a room that must have been his office. The professor kept a very tidy room with bookcases lining the walls filled with books Harry had never seen before, and a desk devoid of stray papers. He sat down behind his desk, and Harry took the chair opposite.

The professor was quiet for a second. "Why?" he asked.

"There are many ways I could interpret that question, professor," Harry replied.

"Why did you do that to professor Snape?" he asked evenly.

"Do what? Call him out for treating me unfairly? This is Hogwarts; professors are supposed to be fair to students. Mention my mother and father? I had hoped by bringing up two people who had a lot of influence in his life, and the equating him with the one he disliked, he'd see how foolish he was being. Curse him? He had his wand to my throat and was threatening me. Knock him out? He was firing curses around the classroom; before long one of them would have hit the students instead of just shattering potions implements," Harry answered in succession. He saw Flitwick sighing. "You know, I went in there thinking, 'oh, here's an opportunity to meet one of my mother's friends,' and this is what it turned into. His classroom manner was disgusting. I am certain if my mother knew how far her old friend had fallen, she would be rolling in her grave.

Conversely, though he too has flaws, my mother could not say enough in praise of professor Slughorn. Seeing as he is apparently available, or at least will shortly be available, I think potions classes will shortly become a house favorite. So, in short, though it pains me to have acted in such a manner to one of my mother's old friends, I believe Hogwarts will be better for it in the long run, and perhaps even former professor Snape as well. However, I am sorry for dragging you into this."

Flitwick sighed. "I want to be angry at you for your actions. I truly do. But I can't be. For too long Severus Snape was allowed to run roughshod. Potions, such a useful field, well, it was a universally hated class. I too, share the optimism that Horace Slughorn will be able to show Hogwarts students the usefulness of potions once again. That said," he gestured at a pocket watch, "Here is your portkey, and good luck with Horace." Harry took it in hand, as Flitwick said, "Activate."

He began rapidly spinning as he felt a jerking sensation from right behind his navel. He held onto the watch for dear life. Just as soon as the whirling sensation started, it stopped and Harry slammed into the ground. Harry waited for the world to stop spinning before

pushing himself up. As he got to his feet, he began to take stock of his surroundings.

He was right in front of a charming looking cottage that looked in tune with its surroundings; carefree and light. It was a wooden cottage with a brown tiled roof. Harry walked up to the door, and knocked three times. He heard movement from inside the cottage, and then the door opened.

On the other side of the doorway was a short, rather round man, with pale, orange eyes, a shiny pate, and a silvery mustache that made him look rather like a walrus.

"Would you be former potions professor Horace Slughorn" Harry asked kindly.

"Perhaps, it depends on what this is about," the man answered just as kindly.

"Oh, well, I am Harry Potter and-" the man's eyes darted to Harry's head, where he saw the faded remnants of his scar.

"I'm Horace Slughorn. Come in, my boy, come in. What can I do for you today?" said Slughorn as he ushered Harry inside.

"Well, I dearly hope I'm not interrupting anything," Harry replied worriedly.

Slughorn laughed. "No, no, I was just enjoying my retirement," he responded with a chuckle.

"Well then, would you mind if we took a seat?" Harry asked. He was beginning to feel nervous.

"Not at all," Slughorn jovially replied as he led Harry to his sitting room. "I'll get us some tea," he said as he exited. Harry contented himself with looking at Slughorn's many photographs on the mantelpiece. "All former students, Harry," Slughorn said as he reentered the room with a silver tray topped with tea, teacups, and assorted small sandwiches.

"These were former members of the Slug Club, sir?" Harry asked.

"Horace, dear boy, and yes they were! That," he said pointing at the photo Harry had just looked at, "is Eldred Worple, a-

"Rather famous author, especially for his rather famous biography/study on vampires, like his colleague Sanguini," Harry finished, and Slughorn looked delighted. Ollivander had pointed that book out as a rather factual and fascinating treatise on human-vampire relations.

"Right next to him is Gwenog Jones, the captain of the Holyhead Harpies. So you know of my former club?" Slughorn asked, positively delighted.

"Yes, my mother recorded all of your club meetings in her diary," Harry replied.

Slughorn's face dimmed. "I knew your mother. She was a very talented student; a vivacious and charming girl. Simply excellent with potions; few were in her league."

"What she wrote about you, sir, was in a very similar vein. That is why I came here," he took a breath as Slughorn looked interested. "Do you have a pensieve?"

Slughorn nodded. There was a flash of fear in his eyes; Harry had no idea why. "Then would you mind if I put a memory in it for you to see?" Slughorn nodded as the apparent nervousness faded, and left to retrieve his pensieve. A few minutes later, he walked back in. Harry took out his wand and withdrew the memory of his encounter with Snape.

Slughorn reappeared a few minutes later looking outraged. "I know I taught him better than that!" he steamed. After a few minutes of venting Harry spoke again.

"The reason I am here is that because of his outburst, Dumbledore had no choice but to fire former professor Snape. Subsequently, Hogwarts needs a new potions professor. Because I am directly involved, I was tasked with convincing you to return to the castle." A look of comprehension dawned on Slughorn's face. "My mother and father both gave you a glowing recommendation as a person who truly knew the art of potions making, without an equal. My mother also hinted at how uniquely talented you were in other fields of

magic, like the arithmancy aid you used to give to former professor Snape. If you would be willing to return, there is no one I would rather learn from than the man who taught my parents so much," Harry finished.

"I am touched by the offer, Harry," Slughorn replied. He seemed to be thinking.

"Well, my mother did describe how you valued a comfortable existence," Slughorn slowly nodded. "Hogwarts is A. desperate for a potions professor B. starving for a potions professor of your caliber C. Full of young talented students with bright futures ahead of them D. students in need of proper direction, and finally E. All of which can be used to live in the lap of luxury with a few hours of teaching thrown in. Think of the opportunity professor."

"Did Lily leave notes on how to win me over?" Slughorn asked jokingly.

"Yes sir, right next to the address of the company that sold you your velvet smoking jackets, and her plans for world domination," Harry replied.

"It's nice to know my favorite student used to stalk me," he laughed. He stopped laughing and was pensive. "I still need some time to think." He was silent for a few seconds. "So tell me, Harry- those spells you used in the memory...?"

"Well sir, my advisor, Mr. Ollivander-

"Wait, Emanuel Ollivander has become your advisor?" Slughorn asked. Harry nodded. "I've never known him to involve himself with other people," he mused.

"Anyway, Mr. Ollivander showed me the value of learning to duel. He taught me the basics of each field, verbal, non-verbal, and wandless over the summer. So I've just been applying what he taught me and learning spells that would be useful in a duel," Harry finished.

"Well, if you've read your parents journals, then you must know the value of transfiguration and charms in a duel," Slughorn replied.

"Yes, sir," Harry answered.

"I'm betting you probably haven't learned some of the really useful charms and transfigurations yet. Pray tell what book have you started learning from?" he asked, rubbing his hands together.

"Simple Spells Every Duelist Needs To Know by Gregory Finch," Harry answered.

Slughorn's eyes lit up. "That is an excellent starter textbook, Harry. However, it is limited to spells solely used for dueling. Once you have mastered the many spells within its covers, which I will be happy to supervise and give tips for, I know a few other texts that would be instrumental. One last question: What fields of magic are you interested in?"

"Well, transfiguration, charms, and DADA, for obvious reasons, sir, then potions, which after hearing so much about it from my mother, I am determined to learn about, parts of herbology, and though I haven't really delved into it much, ancient runes, arithmancy, and Care of magical creatures all look to be extremely interesting," Harry finished.

"Well then Harry, I will make you an offer. I believe there is a lot I can teach you. However, for obvious reasons, there must always be a price. My price is that I want to you join the Slug Club," Slughorn replied jovially.

"I am hardly in a position to refuse, professor." Harry said as Slughorn beamed at the use of his resumed title. "However, though Ollivander has taught me a lot, he has not yet broached the subject of how to properly handle myself in such an environment. So if I were to join..."

"That seems reasonable, Harry. Very reasonable; I accept the job. Now all that's left is to head to the castle and "negotiate" my salary," he said with a wink at Harry. Harry, for his part, found the old man's antics amusing. "Let me pack up, Harry."

He pulled out his wand and gave it a few flicks. Photographs, books, rolls of parchment, and other assorted items began flowing out of the room, and Slughorn shrank his piano as it floated along. Harry heard a continuous dull clunking in the next room. Slughorn

gestured for Harry to follow, and then led him into the next room. A beautiful redwood trunk sat on his bed, also a multi-compartment design, with brass handles on either side. "The trunk is spell resistant, which means the levitation charm is out. Harry, could you possibly grab a side?" Slughorn asked. Harry went over and lifted up a side of the trunk.

"Sir, why didn't you have a feather-light charm incorporated into your trunk?" Harry asked.

"When I first got this trunk, back in the 20's, I didn't have the money for it. I've considered adding it since, but... well I've just been putting it off," he shrugged, grabbing the other side. They began walking to the front door. Slughorn looked around wistfully. Then he led Harry outside, and flicked his wand as every door and window was sealed. He leaned over and laid a hand on his arm. "Ready Harry?"

Harry nodded, and Slughorn dissapparated, holding onto the trunk, and Harry, as both were pulled along with him. They arrived on the road from Hogsmead to Hogwarts. Slughorn took a minute to regain his faculties, and then began dragging the trunk along towards the castle. After fifteen minutes of working to lift his trunk, they were standing by the front doors. Harry opened them and he began lifting towards the dungeons. Along the way, some students looked confused at Harry working with Slughorn, but they shrugged and walked off. Soon, they were standing in front of where Slughorn had directed his office would be. Harry opened the door, and gently let the trunk down at the first table.

"Thank you for all your assistance. Ah, it's good to be back," he said wistfully. "Now I must go and sign a contract. I will see you later, Harry," he said as he began unpacking. Harry walked out of the room, and retraced his steps to Flitwick's office. Once he arrived outside, he knocked on the door and was told to enter.

"Hello professor. Our potions master problem has been put to rest," Harry said.

Flitwick smiled broadly. "You actually got him to come back?" he asked bemusedly. Harry nodded. "Perhaps I misjudged you, Mr. Potter. While we will miss professor Snape," Harry coughed, "Professor Slughorn will be at the very least, a satisfactory replacement. You have done well, Harry. I regret all that has

happened, but I hold out hope for a better future moving forward. Good day, Mr. Potter."

Harry left to go do some more dueling practice. Though he'd won his first unofficial duel, it did show how much practice he desperately needed. His victory was solely due to being underestimated. Thankfully though, he'd potentially found a teacher who would be of great aid in the future.

"Good afternoon class. My name is Horace Slughorn and I am your new Potions professor," he looked around jovially, surveying the class. It was their next potions lesson. "Though I know it's boring, I have some notes to give you on basic ingredient preparations and reactions. Then, during the second half of the class, we will be making the boil-curing potion. Sound good? Excellent. Now then, there are some basic rules of thumb when preparing ingredients such as..."

Harry began taking notes as Slughorn began to explain the basics of potions making. After a half hour of talking, he beckoned to the board. "Now then, I am going to put up the recipe for a basic potion that will cure boils. Mind you, only boils caused by a magical accident will be affected, as this potion contains properties that work to neutralize the magic that won't work for normal boils. We'll tackle that one in your third year. I do not expect a perfect potion. However... for the best of the lot," he pulled a small bottle from his robes, "I have a small dose of pepper-up potion. This is an advanced potion that replenishes stamina for a limited amount of time. This dosage is good for three hours... perhaps enough to stay awake through a history of magic class," Slughorn remarked idly as the students laughed. "All right get to it, and may the best man, or woman, win!"

Harry and the other students scrambled to gather their ingredients and potions-making equipment. As his mother suggested when she wrote about potions, he made sure to read the directions several times over. Then he began preparing his ingredients using a few tricks she had mentioned along the way. He was really thanking his mother for her love of potions and detailed notes about this time. Finally, with a few stirs of the cauldron, his potion turned the correct color. He began looking around the room for the professor. He caught Slughorn's eye, and the professor walked over.

"How are you doing, Mr. Potter?" he asked.

Harry shrugged. "Is this right?"

Slughorn examined the color, and nodded approvingly, and then filled a flask with Harry's concoction. He cursed magical boils onto his face, and then began rubbing the cream onto them. Within seconds, they faded away.

He looked around. "Back to work, all of you," he said, and the students resumed their work. He leaned towards Harry. "I'm already sure you'll win, Mr. Potter," he whispered. "Please stay after class." He walked away.

Twenty minutes later, the rest of the class finished. "Time's up!" shouted Slughorn as he began examining and testing potions. After five minutes of this he stopped testing and looked up. "Mr. Potter wins," he declared. He held out the vial for Harry to receive. Harry took it and tucked it safely into his robe pocket. The other students began making their way out of class, some grumbling about being bested, as Harry slowly packed up his equipment. Once everyone else had left, Harry fastened his bag, and walked over to Slughorn's desk, where the man was sitting with barely contained excitement.

"You are even better than your mother was," Slughorn said in awe.

"Well, that's hardly fair to say. You see, she left me her notes on potions making, which I've closely read," Harry explained.

"Those notes would be invaluable to making perfect potions. However, I noticed that you have the instincts of a potioneer, instincts it took even your mother years to refine," Slughorn replied. "You weren't overestimating your talent in potions, I see. Now then, seeing as you are such a promising student, and several professors have agreed with that assessment, then I have some supplemental reading for you. Do you have parchment?" Harry pulled a quill and some parchment out of his bag pocket and then Slughorn rattled off several books Harry was sure were in his trunk as good reading for charms, transfiguration, potions, warding, and dueling.

"Thank you professor," said Harry as he tucked his list and quill back into his bag.

"It's no trouble, Harry. You do have this weekend free?" Slughorn asked.

"First year flying lessons Saturday afternoon, sir, but other than that nothing," Harry replied.

"Wonderful, I was hoping to have our first meeting Saturday evening. In fact, good old Eldred has agreed to be our first guest," Slughorn mentioned fondly.

"Just tell me a time and I'll be there, sir," said Harry eagerly.

"Excellent Harry. One last thing, if I may?" Harry nodded. "How has your dueling practice gone?"

"Well, in detail," he said slowly, and Slughorn nodded, "I perfected the non-verbal version of the hurling hex, the heatless blasting curse, the wind blast charm, the stunning spell and its counter, the severing charm, finite incantatem, the leg-locker curse, episkey, and the impediment jinx," Harry fired off from memory.

"You learned all that in a week?" Slughorn asked incredulously.

Harry shrugged. "Mr. Ollivander helped me learn Occlumency. So I can summon the willpower to cast a spell. We practiced a lot of magic, so my magical strength is there. And just before I left, he helped me put it all together."

"Well if I might make a suggestion..." Slughorn trailed off. Harry nodded eagerly. "I know two spells that you could probably use: the fire-whip curse, and the dark curse shield. Come to me a half hour before the dinner on Saturday, I'll send the scroll along later in the week, and we'll work on those. Until then Mr. Potter," he said as he dismissed Harry.

Harry left the classroom only to be met by now-headless Sir Nicholas. "Harold, what a glorious pleasure it is to see you," he said as the ghost began floating alongside him.

"I see the Baron kept up his end of the deal," Harry replied.

Nicolas laughed. "Yes, his bloodiness did just as you said. You are a man of your word Mr. Potter- one who achieved what was thought impossible for nearly 500 years."

"It was no trouble," Harry replied.

"Be that as it may, I will not forget this great favor. If ever you need a favor from me, all you need do is ask it," Nicolas offered.

"Thank you. There may come a day when I cash in on that promise. Take care, Sir Nicolas," said Harry as he walked off.

"Now then, since you have gotten the first one so quickly, the incantation for the dark curse shield is Protego Horribilis," Slughorn recited. Harry had spent the first twenty minutes learning to wield the fire whip curse, Flagro Flagello, and while he hadn't mastered it, he'd never-the-less conjured and controlled the flame whip, which served to further impress Slughorn. Now the professor was demonstrating the cross-body wand movements used to shield against darker curses. He gestured for Harry to try.

"Protego Horribilis," Harry said as he mimicked Slughorn. A darker colored variation of the shield charm sprang into existence for a few seconds, before dissolving. Harry continued to work with it as Slughorn coached him. Finally once their ten minutes were up, Harry sheathed his wand and smoothed his dress robes. Slughorn nodded to his office, and Harry followed him in.

Slughorn had already set the table with fine silverware and china, and a merry fire was crackling welcomingly. Harry walked over to the table to see where Slughorn had placed his name. Sure enough, he was in between Slughorn and Neville. He looked up to see his friend in question walk into the room. Harry beckoned him over.

"Welcome, Neville," he said clapping him on the shoulder.

"Harry, what is this?" Neville asked slowly, but there was a whisper of excitement in his voice.

Harry looked around to see if the professor was near them, and seeing he wasn't turned back to Neville. "This is an old club professor Slughorn restarted, called the Slug Club," Harry replied in a whisper. "He always invited the talented and the well-connected.

You fit the bill on both counts my friend," Harry said in a whisper. "He used this club to forge connections between prospective members, and from it he always took a small cut, whether some of his favorite crystallized pineapple, or his opinion carrying weight in the ministry."

Neville gulped. "I don't belong here!" he whispered urgently.

"That's nonsense!" Harry replied. "You're a very talented wizard, and of course everyone knows your family. Besides, if nothing else, and at the bare minimum, you are my best friend, and that alone will make Slughorn keep you around."

Neville looked extremely touched to hear Harry say that. "Really?" he asked his voice barely audible over the crackling fire.

"Yes," Harry said confidently. "Your parents were both members of this club when they were at Hogwarts, and I bet Slughorn remembers them well."

Neville looked much happier about being here, and he and Harry were soon seated side by side chatting away as others Slughorn invited began arriving.

Harry sensed someone waiting to speak with him, and looked up from his conversation with Neville to see a face he remembered from the book jacket. "Good evening, Mr. Worple," he said, getting to his feet. Neville rose as well. "I am Harry Potter, and this is Neville Longbottom." They both politely shook the clearly floored man's hands. "I must say that I am a big fan of your treatise on living with vampires. Will Sanguini be joining us this evening?"

Worple apparently regained his train of thought. "No, unfortunately Sanguini was feeling under the weather this evening. Longbottom, eh? I remember your parents very well. Old Frank was really quite something with a wand. And as for you Mr. Potter, well my only question is this: is the world ready for a Harry Potter biography?"

"I'd say yes, except that I'd think it would be better if we waited ten years or so until I'm Minister of Magic," All three laughed.

"Why on Earth would you want to shackle yourself down so?" he asked merrily.

"You know how it is, Mr. Worple. Today the Dark Lord, tomorrow the world," he said in a mock evil voice. Worple had a good sense of humor. He walked off chuckling to his own spot a few seats down from professor Slughorn.

By now all of the prospective members of the Slug club had arrived. Harry looked around the room to see who had been invited. As he looked around he picked out Susan Bones, Blaise Zabini, Daphne Greengrass, Hermione Granger, and Padma Patil. They were sprinkled in between upper years Harry didn't know, except two Ravenclaws: 2nd year Marcus Belby and 4th year Roger Davies. There were two Hufflepuffs: one a seventh year and one a third year. There were four other Gryffindors. One other Ravenclaw Harry didn't know. And finally, three upper year Slytherins, who were also unknown to Harry.

Slughorn cleared his throat, and everyone focused on him. "Ehem, I want to welcome you all to the first meeting of the Slug Club. It's time for introductions. To my left is Harry Potter. Next to him is Neville Longbottom." Slughorn went around the table stating everyone's names as Harry filed them away for future use. By the end of the introductions, Harry was determined to keep a lookout for Percy Weasley, Oliver Wood, Angelina Johnson, Cormac McLaggen- the Gryffindors- Nymphadora Tonks (Who apparently hated her first name), Cedric Diggory- 'Puffs- Sarah Fawcett- the other 'Claw- Chad Warrington, Peter Andrews, and Helen Rogers- the Slytherins.

Once the introductions were over, food appeared and Slughorn went round the table chatting with everyone as they ate. Finally, as they were polishing off desserts, it was Harry's turn. He noticed several people seemed to favor listening to him over their desserts. Neville smiled reassuringly; his interview with Slughorn had gone well, as they'd talked about several friends of the Longbottom family and Herbology.

"Finally, last but not least, Harry Potter," Slughorn said.

"Is this the point where I stand and bow?" Harry mock whispered to him. Several people chuckled appreciatively as Slughorn beamed.

"Yes, I think we all know who Harry Potter is," Eldred Worple cut in.

"Really? How do you all know me?" he turned to Slughorn in mock horror. "Are they stalkers?" he whispered.

"If your dueling career doesn't work out, you could always try for one as a comedian," Slughorn offered.

"Who said anything about dueling? As I told Mr. Worple: career politician all the way. All I need to do is become corrupt," Harry replied offhandedly.

Granger seemed particularly unhappy by his brand of comedy, but several others laughed heartily, Slughorn among them.

He turned to introduce Worple as his guest for the evening. Worple then began speaking about his life and his research about the vampire clans for a good half hour. It was a very entertaining lecture, one Harry wished he could have taken notes during, as Worple also described a few ways to defeat a Vampire in combat. Many other members seemed restless and perhaps bored by him. Neville, thankfully, wasn't among them, as he caught on, at Harry's whispered prompts, to the important information Worple conveyed. When he finished, all the students nodded politely, though Harry and Neville made sure to give more enthusiastic applause as they learned a lot. As the students began to leave, Harry and Neville lingered.

They slowly moved over to where Slughorn was speaking with Eldred. They both turned to see Harry and Neville. "Hello professor, Mr. Worple, Neville and I just wanted to thank you sir," he said looking at Eldred, "for your fascinating lecture on Vampires, and you professor, for the invite."

"Yes, thank you so much for your gracious hospitality," Neville chimed in.

Slughorn smiled merrily at both of them. "Happy to know you both had a good time. I'll tell you about our next meeting after this week's potions lesson. Now then boys, you wouldn't want to be caught out after curfew, so have a nice night, and I'll see you soon."

"Thanks professor," they said in unison as they headed for the door.

"Had a nice time, Neville?" Harry asked as they began walking towards their common rooms.

"Yeah, it was actually a lot of fun," he remarked. "I learned so much about Vampires..." he trailed off. "I didn't know Sue was going, or else I would have come with her," he admitted.

Harry smiled. "Coordinate with her next time," Harry replied. "Maybe you also can get on the same page with the other Hufflepuff invitees."

Neville's face fell. "I don't remember their names," he said after several moments of silence.

"Nymphadora Tonks and Cedric Diggory," Harry said offhandedly. Neville stared at him. "I made it a point to try and memorize everyone who was there today. Never know when I might cross paths with any of them."

They walked in silence for a bit before Neville split off with a "goodnight." Harry began walking towards Ravenclaw tower, intending to do some reading on dueling tactics.

However, when he entered the tower, he was treated to the inquisition.

"Where have you been?" Padma Patil demanded.

"Walking with Neville. Why?" Harry asked.

"Curfew began fifteen minutes ago. Did you think walking with Neville was worth possibly losing Ravenclaw points?" she snarled.

"Frankly I don't care," said Harry flatly. Padma looked appalled, and Harry really wanted to roll his eyes. Padma was a real teacher's pet, almost in the league of that Granger girl... almost. "Good night Padma," he said politely, brushing past her to go upstairs. He could hear Padma cursing at him as he walked away.

Chapter Seven: Meeting With The Headmaster

Harry had been at Hogwarts nearly two months. It was hard to believe time went that fast. Two months of dueling, Slug club meetings, and schoolwork. And he'd finally gotten around to paying Hagrid visits. The giant was happy to spend an afternoon chatting away with him. Harry gave the man credit; he really knew his magical creatures. Hagrid could talk at length about the various creatures he'd handled, like the hippogriff flock. In particular he'd introduced Harry to Thestrals, the winged reptilian horses that were only visible to those who'd seen death. Considering how many deaths he'd seen in Voldemort's memories, it was no shock the Thestral colony was visible to him.

His classes were just as interesting as chats with Hagrid, and he'd learned loads. Potions especially, had become his favorite class as he'd gotten more daring with his potions, experimenting with new ways of making them. It seemed so easy when he thought about it in his head... a pinch of lacewing fly here, an extra stir there, and voila, another way to make the same potions, maybe even improving the potion a bit. A few that he showed to the professor had, if possible, garnered more praise. Indeed, Slughorn had called in a few favors and had a few of his former students who had gone on to be duelists come into Hogwarts for a weekend. During which time, he introduced them to Harry, and they all showed him a few spells and tricks he could put to use.

All of this training helped him learn to use every spell in the Finch book verbally and non-verbally by the second week of October. When he was training with actual duelists and former aurors and such, how could he not learn so much from them? He'd actually gotten through a few books worth of dueling spells. So now his duelist repertoire consisted of the spells from the Finch book, the flame whip curse and dark curse shield, the bolt thrower (railroad tie conjuration), the snake conjuration, the lip-lock curse, the inversion hex, and a few specials Slughorn showed him from the war against Grindelwald: weather magic. The professor had shown him several weather spells that had been employed during the war: lightning bolt conjuration, creating whirlwinds and snowstorms, and another rare beauty- the push wave. He'd also shown Harry a few more shields: Protego Totalum, an area effect shield, Fortis Aegis and Patrocinor Fidelis, two good shields that blocked both spells and physical assaults, and a good full body shield Absolvo Ancile. Slughorn told

him that by Christmas he should begin branching out into other fields to better duel.

He'd made little progress in any other magical field aside from what was on the curriculum. It was still good enough to hold top honors academically in his year. Of course, the other classes were starting to get interesting, and his duelist training was beginning to cross him into the other realms of magic, so that would soon change.

He still kept to himself mostly, and his small circle of friends: Neville, Anthony, Susan, and Hannah. He was on excellent terms with several Ravenclaw upper years for all the points he'd gotten the house for almost always being the first to successfully cast a spell in class. Padma Patil still glared at him whenever they saw each other, as did the other Ravenclaw girls when she'd recounted her tale of catching Harry fifteen minutes late. She seemed to take it as a personal affront that Harry would dare besmirch the name of Ravenclaw House. Her twin, Parvati, on the other hand, didn't seem to begrudge Harry fifteen minutes of lateness. In fact, Parvarti Patil seemed to genuinely like him. Of course, every time he spoke with her in class, or when she came over to the Ravenclaw table to talk with him, he'd notice Padma staring daggers at her. Girls were weird like that.

Padma wasn't the only one getting on his nerves. Hermione Granger seemed to take it as a personal affront anytime he correctly cast a spell, or answered a question correctly, or even got a good mark, though he wasn't sure how she knew. Maybe she had homework senses or something. When he tried to speak with her, she would huff, snort, or just outright dismiss him. For all that, she just barely cracked the top three in Harry's most annoying girls contest.

Second and first place went to Tracey Davis and Daphne Greengrass of Slytherin. The terrible twosome, as Harry had taken to referring to them in private, went out of their way to harass him for no apparent reason. That made every Herbology lesson really annoying as their whispers and "accidents" were always timed for the worst possible moment. Thankfully, though, Harry could go to professor Slughorn, who was great at sorting out his own house's affairs. Still, that hadn't deterred them, as they'd shifted to ambushes in between classes and provocation in the Great Hall. Harry had no idea what to do about either of them. All he knew was that this was something about the Marriage Contract between him and Daphne.

After this nonsense started, he'd promptly cancelled any plans to have dinner with the Greengrass family.

Really, Harry was starting to become convinced that there was a conspiracy by the girls of Hogwarts against him. The Ravenclaw girls, Gryffindor girls, and Slytherin girls were either too friendly or too angry with him for it to be believed that they weren't conspiring. What else could explain his apparent polarization effects on the first year girls of Hogwarts?

He suddenly regained focus and realized he'd been zoning out in History of Magic. Thankfully, everyone else was asleep so no one noticed. He turned back to his book on animation charms. He deposited it in his bag once he saw the time; the bell was due to ring any second. Sure enough, a few moments later, the bell did ring and the other Ravenclaws jerked awake. Harry was already up and out the door.

"Hey Potter," a familiar, annoying female voice called out to him as he headed to lunch. He turned to glare at Tracey Davis.

"What can I do for you today?" he asked with forced politeness.

"Well Potter-" she spied McGonagall coming down the hall, "we were wondering if you could answer a question on Transfiguration for us?"

"No, sorry, I don't have the time right now. Good day," he said smiling in relief that they couldn't annoy him today. It was really annoying that he knew all of these great spells for dueling, and yet he was constantly harassed by the girls of Hogwarts. Dilemmas like this had probably spawned many of the Dark Lords in history, he mused. Well at least tomorrow was Halloween, and that meant the famous Hogwarts feast; Harry could use a good celebration.

"Why won't they leave you alone, Harry?" asked Neville curiously as he dined at the Hufflepuff table to get away from Padma and her group.

"Beats me. You know that advice about ignore them and they'll go away. It's rubbish," Daphne had distracted him at a crucial moment in Herbology, nearly killing his plant. He'd just finished telling Neville

why he looked ready to kill something. He was still stabbing his potatoes to relieve some of his excess anger.

"You know Harry, if you think it would do some good, I could try and talk to them," Susan offered.

"I appreciate the offer, Sue, but I can handle it," Harry replied. He checked the time. "Well, I have to get going. See you four around," he said as he walked away.

"That's nice Harry, but I'm still doing it anyway," Susan muttered.

"It's better to apologize than request permission and be denied," Hannah commented shrewdly.

"That it is, Hannah... That it is," Susan replied.

Neville and Anthony looked at each other and shrugged.

Harry was really enjoying the Halloween feast so far. Susan and Hannah had volunteered to find a way to distract Daphne, Tracey, Hermione, and the Ravenclaw group so he could have a peaceful feast. They had been as good as their word, though the tradeoff was that neither of them was here either. But Anthony and Neville, who'd this time joined them at the Ravenclaw table, were having a lot of fun chatting away. Slughorn had recently decided to issue Anthony an invitation to the Slug club, and the other two were celebrating his admission. Or at least they were until professor Quirrell barged in.

"TROLL- IN THE DUNGEONS- Thought you ought to know," he said after sprinting into the hall right up to Dumbledore and right before fainting.

Dumbledore quelled the uproar of noise that had arisen from Quirrell's proclamation. "Prefects, lead your houses back to the dormitories immediately," he shouted, and the prefects moved to do just that.

Neville and Anthony made moves to get up, but Harry pulled both of them back down. "Guys, what was Hannah and Susan's plan to get me a day of peace and quiet?" The horrible truth sank in.

"They were going to try and stop them from harassing you further," Neville blurted out. "They were meeting in one of the girl's bathrooms."

Harry withdrew his wand, images of horrific things involving a troll and his friends flooding his mind. "Let's go," he whispered urgently, and Anthony and Neville began running after Harry.

He arrived at the girl's bathroom after a five minute sprint. "Was this the one?" he panted. They nodded. He kicked open the door, wand in hand.

Ten heads whipped around to see who'd just barged in. "You need to get back to your dormitories. There's a troll on the loose," Harry panted.

"Uh, Harry," Anthony said gesturing to his right.

Harry turned to see the troll in question; twelve feet tall with lumpy, gray skin, a horrid smell, and a huge wooden club. His eyes darted to the other end of the corridor. "Listen, get them and go- Don't Argue. I can handle this... I hope," he whispered to Neville.

Neville still looked ready to argue, but a grunt from the troll changed his mind, and he gestured for Susan to follow. He hoped whatever Harry was going to use to distract it worked. The girls began sneaking around Harry as the troll shuffled further down the corridor. Finally it noticed Harry and charged at him, club raised.

Neville, Anthony, and the girls accompanying them turned to watch unbeknownst at the time to Harry. He raised his wand and screamed "Absolvo Ancile" in his head. A whitish sphere appeared right in front of him, right as the troll struck with its club. The club was deflected by the shield. Harry dispelled the shield and shouted "Flagro Flagello" in his head. The fire whip sprang into existence at the end of his wand. He raised it and with a crack, split the troll's club in half.

"Professor, I noticed something," Harry said to Slughorn a few weeks ago.

"What have you noticed?" he asked curiously.

"When I cast fire spells, or water spells, they seem much more powerful than any wind spell I cast," Harry answered.

"Ah, that my boy, well, it could possibly be a newly awakened elemental affinity, or even two. Certain wizards are able to wield spells of a certain element with more efficiency and power. Thus, if this is in fact the case, in combat, fire and water spells will be your weapons of choice. Though you haven't really dealt with Earth yet, so for all I know, you might be able to use all three. Basically a fire or water spell will be slightly more powerful when you use it," he finished.

The troll looked down at its shattered club. It roared and swung the piece in its hand at Harry. His only choice was to raise the Absolvo shield again. The makeshift club again ricocheted off his shield. Harry shouted "Diffindo" in his head and pointed it at the troll's arm. It barely made a scratch. The troll was recovering now, and he was rapidly running out of energy, so Harry had one choice before he was squashed. "Confringo" he mentally shouted pointing his wand at the ceiling. As expected, his blasting curse brought part of the ceiling down right over the troll's head. The trolls grunts and moans soon ceased as it went silent; Harry suspected it had been knocked out.

"I- Is it, dead?" he heard Hermione ask. He was surprised they were still there.

Harry turned around to tell her so, but he never got a chance. The troll apparently wasn't dead, or unconscious, as it sent the rubble on top of it flying in every direction with an angry grunt. Harry threw up another Absolvo in front of Neville and the other onlookers but bits of rubble smashed into his head and knocked his wand out of his hand.

As his head spun, he heard various cries of "Harry!" some male, most female. The troll seemed ready to begin smashing again. In fact, it had half its club in hand and was bearing down on him.

Harry knew blacking out was almost a certainty. His world had finally stopped spinning, but started fading. He had one chance... one. Last. Chance. He summoned his wand back to him, feeling near magical exhaustion from using so much advanced magic in such a short time span, and pointed it straight up. The troll began bringing its club down for a finishing blow.

"TELUM CONICIO!" Harry shouted, not even having the energy for a non-verbal spell. A red hot railroad tie shot from the tip of his wand right to where the Troll's heart was supposed to be. Its aim was true; as the red smear emerging from both sides of the troll indicated. It staggered back as it dropped the half-a-club right onto Harry's leg.

The Troll's collapse and Harry's roar of agony, as his leg was fractured in several places from the club's remnants falling on it, were the last he knew as his world went dark.

As the many well-wishers crowded around Mr. Potter's bed, Albus Dumbledore stood off to the side, obscured by a disillusionment charm. He was close to shaking, fearing what his inquiry was about to yield. Today had proved that he could no longer ignore the enigma that was Harry Potter.

Indeed, the boy's proficiency at magic suggested something sinister; something Dumbledore had prayed would not come to pass. Yet how else could he explain the anomaly of Harry Potter? What other explanation could answer how he was capable of using flame whips, railroad tie conjurations, and occlumency as a first year? How else could Hagrid have decided to allow him to stay in Diagon Alley, violating Dumbledore's orders, if not via a legilimency induced suggestion? Why else would the Sorting Hat talk about Riddle and Harry so often? All circumstantial evidence, yet it all was pointing in a very similar and frightening direction. Harry was obviously possessed- be it by the horcrux in his head, or even Riddle seeking him out.

He had his suspicions of course. The fact that he was a skillful Occlumens, as Severus reported from gentle probing of his shields, attested to the fact that he had been taught- probably by some form of Riddle; it shouldn't have been possible without direct harmony or conflict between the Horcrux and his mind. His sacking of Severus was another indicator. Though he had arranged with Snape to pretend to be a loyal Death Eater with his ire at being sacked, that Riddle went to these lengths meant he soon felt he was not going to need a spy at Hogwarts. It had forced him to keep his distance, fearful that Tom was going to try and assassinate him. Yet he needed to be monitored no matter the price exacted.

However, now that Tom was in this unconscious stupor, Dumbledore could get to work, trying to remove the possession. He clenched his trusty wand that had served him well since defeating Gellert. He waved it in a complex pattern, trying to magically determine how far the possession had spread. The results made him frown.

Nothing. There were only the tiniest of traces of Riddle. Frowning, and never having failed to cast a spell with the Elder Wand, he tried again. Nothing. Tom had almost no presence in the boy's body. Certainly nothing substantial enough to enact a possession. And then his eyes widened.

The spell had turned up negative! It was not even registering the horcrux in Harry's head! He quickly tried out another spell for the occasion. The same result! Was it possible- He never contained a soul fragment! Desperately, he cast spell after spell, trying to find the truth.

Harry wasn't possessed; at all. He felt a heavy weight on his shoulders. All of his plans for the defeat of Voldemort had included the central element that Harry was a horcrux. Yet here was direct evidence to the contrary. If he wasn't... Well Dumbledore's whole plan had relied on a horcrux ridden boy being kept in a weakened state just in case of possession.

How could he be so powerful otherwise? It didn't make any sense. Why would he purposely get Severus fired? What had happened with Hagrid? How did he secure his emancipation; know his way around the Wizarding World legal system? He would have the answers when Harry awoke.

"-Is- -all right?"

"He- kil- so brave."

"Harry- strong- pull through."

"Albus- - - another batch- Skele-gro."

Harry bolted upright. "No, no, that's all right," he summoned his wand from across the room ignoring the shocked looks of the room's

other occupants. He began trying to heal himself; no way was he going to drink skele-gro again!

"Mr. Potter, while I am pleased by your rapid recovery-" Madam Pomphrey the school nurse was saying.

He looked directly at professor Slughorn. "No. Skele-gro. Ever Again," he breathed out.

Slughorn began roaring with laughter. "Surely that dose I gave you after you went a few rounds with Auror Scrimgeour wasn't that terrible," he choked out between laughs.

Harry had finished siphoning off the blood, and was attempting to make a charm he'd only ever read about work so he could bandage his leg. "Man is a bloody sadist," he murmured.

"Mr. Potter, I must insist you cease this foolishness!" shrieked Pomphrey.

"As your head of house, I find I must agree," squeaked Flitwick. Harry hadn't registered he was even in the room.

He gave his wand a few more waves, and his leg was set in the makeshift cast. "There all done. I'll see you in two weeks for a checkup?" he asked hopefully.

"Bloody Potters," Pomphrey grumbled. "No, Mr. Potter. I'm afraid I need to keep you here for examination for another day."

Harry started laughing hysterically. "You're funny!"

"Mr. Potter, need I remind you that you just went toe to toe with a mountain troll!" hissed Pomphrey.

"I didn't know that. Please, tell me more," Harry responded dryly.

"Harry, please spend the night, I think you'll be better for it. After all, you want to be in top shape; Alastor Moody this weekend," Slughorn said.

Everyone turned to glare at him as Harry stared at him and then mournfully set his wand on his bedside table and got back under the

covers. "Is he going to be completely free Sunday?" Harry asked/demanded as he resigned himself to the hospital wing. The glares changed to looks of bewilderment.

"Of course Harry. He said to be ready for six am," Slughorn replied.

"Joy; another bloody sadist," Harry groaned.

"I'm glad to see you're all right. I'll see you in class, Harry," said Slughorn as he left the room chuckling.

"Then may I have a word with Mr. Potter," came a genial voice from Harry's left. He looked to see Albus Dumbledore in all his glory.

"Certainly Headmaster; I will escort everyone else outside," Pomphrey said breathlessly as she began ushering everyone out of her Hospital Wing. The Headmaster's tone had brooked no argument.

"Well Harry, as you may have from Madam Pomphrey, and I daresay its worth noting that we've had unfortunate meetings in the past, I am Albus Dumbledore," he said once everyone had left the hospital wing.

"Pleasure to meet you. I don't want to seem accusatory or anything, but where were you when I was dueling a mountain troll?" Harry asked conversationally.

"Unfortunately, I was with many of the other professors in the Dungeons. I only arrived to see you kill the troll," he replied airily.

"Ah that explains it. Of course the thousand year old castle's well-known ward scheme is incapable of monitoring such unimportant activity. Silly me," Harry mentioned dryly.

The Headmaster shifted nervously. "Yes well... I wanted to ask you about your duel with the Mountain Troll, if I may?"

"Which part?" Harry replied.

He blinked. "All of it. I was unaware that non-verbal magic, Absolvo shields, fire whips, and conjured railroad ties were even manageable by first years."

"I wanted to learn to duel. Mr. Ollivander gave me all the needed advice. And professor Slughorn's many contacts are always willing to show the younger generation a thing or two with their wands," Harry said in monotone.

The Headmaster waved his wand and conjured a chair. Another flick of his wand and all the doors and windows of the Hospital Wing sealed shut. "I was indeed aware that first years could manage such feats, but not with the drive I see in you. Your ability and maturity reinforces the decision I am making: the decision to level with you."

"If this is about the prophecy, don't bother; I already know," Harry replied smoothly.

Dumbledore blinked. Once. Twice. Thrice. "You know it! Is that why you are working yourself to exhaustion in learning to duel?" he asked quietly.

"Are you kidding!" Harry asked incredulously. Dumbledore looked him square in the eye. "I have never had so much fun. Even with the troll: hey, I managed to defeat a bloody Mountain Troll! Soon I'll be ready to branch out; maybe dueling with charms or transfiguration. But it was never about what I might have to do one day, fifty years down the road. I want to learn magic. There's so much to know, and I've barely scratched the surface."

Dumbledore broke out in a wide smile, as he came face to face with enthusiasm he had only encountered a few times in his life. Time to correct a grievous mistake he'd made long ago, and to develop a good accord with young Harry, if only to get answers... eventually. "In that case, Harry, may I invite you to meet with me during your free time? I feel there is much I could teach you. You've already proven yourself more mature than I was at your age. Besides, your friend Alistair, has been getting antsy about you visiting."

Harry blinked. "I completely forgot about him! Wow, I hope he doesn't take it hard." He shook himself. "Anyway, I'd be happy to come and learn from you. What will I be learning?"

"I could say 'a little of this, a little of that' but I suspect you'd curse me. Really, I will be teaching you a little, or in some cases a lot, of every subject. You display a rare aptitude at magic I have only seen

twice before, and to my shame, I wasted both opportunities to do some good," he replied genially.

"Then I'll see you tomorrow night, sir. Is that all?" Harry asked.

"No, unfortunately Harry, that was the good news for today. The bad news concerns your residence during the school holidays," he said sadly.

"Yeah, I'm not ever going back to the Dursleys. I will seriously just run away, and make you spend every free moment tracking me down, and then when you try and order me back as my Headmaster, I'll transfer schools. I'm sure the Headmistress of Beauxbatons won't force me to live in the equivalent of a jail during the summer holidays" Harry responded defiantly.

"The blood protection the wards provide—" Dumbledore was interrupted.

"Wait a second; blood protection? Explain that to me please," Harry commanded politely.

"As long as you reside there, no external forces can harm you," Dumbledore explained with infinite patience.

"Which means there is something wrong, seeing as Dudley could invite his friends over anytime and they could beat me up if they felt like it," Harry responded just as kindly.

Dumbledore blinked again. "That should not have been possible," he said slowly. "Your mother's love should have lived on through your Aunt's blood and provided protection, from both Magicals and muggles. Really what would be the use of such a protection if it wasn't that flexible?" Dumbledore asked rhetorically.

"Well it happened. Do some research, reach some conclusions, and get back to me. Until then, my answer will be the same," Harry responded.

"That I will, Harry. Now then I must depart. Tomorrow evening, the set password will be Banana Fritters. I will see you then. Good day," with that Dumbledore flicked his wand to unseal everything and walked out of the now open Hospital Wing doors.

"Blimey, what was that Harry?" Neville said as he took the chair Dumbledore had left.

"I grilled him on his shitty response time. He offered me some advanced tutoring, Nev. Oh yeah, and we're definitely fighting about my summer arrangements. You know; normal things for a Tuesday," Harry replied airily.

Neville blinked. "Is it bad that I'm now questioning my own sanity? Because I'm not sure I actually just heard that."

"See a psychiatrist. They'll be able to say whether you're fine or not," Harry replied. "How do you think Anthony handles living in the same dorm room?"

"I get checked out every other week mate, just to make sure my sanity's still there," Anthony responded wisely.

"Ahem," Harry looked up to see Daphne clearing her throat, probably to get his attention.

"We just wanted to say we're sorry," she said gesturing to herself and Tracey.

"Does that mean you're going to stop trying to get out of the bloody contract? I was already planning to buy out," Harry asked. He finally figured out that Daphne's not wanting to marry him had been why they were harassing him. They were probably hoping that if they annoyed him enough, he would buy out, and Daphne would be in the clear. He could already imagine Tracey agreeing to this idiotic scheme after Daphne explained to her how barbaric the Wizarding World was, with their betrothal agreements and all.

"No actually, er... well I suppose a betrothal to a wizard of such stature is not a bad thing. No need to cancel the contract," she ground out nervously. It took every ounce of Harry's self-discipline and Occlumency to prevent shouting.

"Okay, so after annoying me for the past two months to try and convince me to cancel the betrothal contract, now you have suddenly changed your mind. I'm thrilled," Harry replied dryly. "Only

problem is that I'd rather not be forced to marry someone I despise; the money is worth it."

Daphne looked extremely disappointed, as did Tracey. "Isn't this what you wanted? You're free, I'm free; everyone wins." Daphne and Tracey, seeing that there was nothing left to be said after they'd burned that bridge to ashes, walked out of the hospital wing with disappointment etched on their faces. He turned to Padma's group: Padma, Lisa, Morag, Mandy, and Su.

"What can I do for you?" he asked cheerfully.

"Uh, I just wanted to say sorry about bothering you," Padma replied, hoping that Harry wasn't about to bite her head off. The other girls nodded earnestly, "We'll leave you alone now."

"Bye," Harry said cheerfully as another group of troublemakers left. He turned to Hermione. "Yes?"

"Er, I wanted to say I was sorry as well. I mean..." She appeared to be struggling to find the right words.

"You're sorry you were angry that I was better at magic than you?" Harry asked helpfully.

She nodded glumly. "Yes, I've never been beaten academically... ever. It stung."

"Join the club. I had to fake my grades throughout primary. Least here all I have to worry about is the occasional Mountain Troll," Harry replied.

"How can you be so blasé about this?" Hermione demanded. It looked like she'd wanted to say that for the past ten minutes.

"About what?" Harry responded.

"Oh, I don't know, perhaps the Mountain Troll that almost killed you?" she bit back.

Harry shrugged. "I'm still alive, and I'm taking steps to get better, so this kind of thing won't happen again."

"Get better! Get Better! Harry, you killed a bloody mountain troll! Seventh years couldn't do that!" Hermione shrieked. Wow, what an emotional whirlwind, Harry thought. Humility, then anger, than awe... what next?

"There is always a 'better.' Just because I can cast fairly impressive magic, something everyone else seemed to gloss over, doesn't mean my future opponents won't be able to cast really impressive magic," Harry replied.

At that Hermione burst into tears. Harry quickly sat up and on instinct, probably Ollivandarian instinct, pulled her into an embrace where she sobbed against his hospital gown. Finally, after a few minutes she stopped.

"I feel like you aren't taking this seriously. Do you have any idea how scary it was, watching you? For a second, I'd thought you'd died," she whispered.

"Of course I know how awful it must have looked; I was there! However, I refuse to adopt a doom and gloom outlook. I think you would generally want to refuse that fate as well. In fact, the emotional whirlwind you have undergone indicates there is something else bothering you and all the frustration you've directed at me, now and previously, is because of that situation," Harry said, letting her go. He was already imagining how much his face would sting after she slapped him; he was taking such a shot in the dark.

She was silent for a long moment, staring at him. Finally she looked away as she whispered, "I hate Gryffindor." She took a few breaths. "I hate my housemates, I hate how I'm an outcast there. I hate how, to them, I'm just a bossy bookworm. I hate Gryffindor."

Harry resisted the urge to confirm her statement that she was a bossy bookworm. Optimism and constructive thinking would serve him best now. "You know I could probably talk to Alistair and get the whole matter resolved," Harry pointed out, as the idea came into his head.

"Alistair?" Susan asked. Harry had almost forgotten she and Hannah were there.

"The Sorting Hat. I'm sure there is something in the Hogwarts rulebook about being resorted in cases of extreme unhappiness," Harry continued.

Hermione looked at him wide-eyed and disbelieving. "Could you?" she whispered hopefully. In fact, Harry imagined her expression would be similar if she had received every book in Flourish and Blotts as a present.

"Sure, I'll see him tomorrow night. I'll talk to him then. Though I'll probably owe him a favor or two... hmm," he cleared his throat. "Ah well, Alistair doesn't strike me as a hard bargainer. Feeling better?"

"Yes, much," Hermione replied wiping her eyes. "If I do get another chance, I'm going to choose the right house this time. I'm a Ravenclaw through and through, and I can't dwell with the Lions anymore."

"That's the spirit. Go on, I'll find you once I hear back from Alistair. But no matter what, it will get better," she walked out of the hospital wing smiling broadly.

He turned to his four remaining friends. "So do I have a career as a motivational speaker in the cards?

"Come in Harry," Dumbledore said as Harry went to knock on his office door.

Harry walked in and surveyed the office, with Dumbledore's various gadgets, his personal collection of inventions, and his phoenix sitting on a perch to the side. "Impressive."

"Before we get down to today's lesson, there are two topics we must broach." He sighed and Harry noticed how old and defeated he was looking. "I took your suggestion in hand and went to examine the wards at Privet Drive. Much to my horror, you were right. Your Aunt, through her... well the only word for it is hatred, had managed to systematically disable the magic behind the blood wards. If a dark wizard had known..." He was silent. "Suffice it to say, you were right. You can't be returned there. However, for obvious reasons, most prominent among them that I am the Headmaster of Hogwarts, and thus I have an obligation to my students; there is the matter of where you will reside during the holidays."

"I could point out that you've failed that obligation thus far, but I won't. Is this the point where I hear that the Leaky Cauldron is out as an option?" Harry asked.

"If nothing else presents itself, then I believe you could safely spend next summer there; though the summer after is too risky for me to consider, in case unfriendly eyes sense a pattern. However, to be frank, I would prefer that you resided in a well warded structure," Dumbledore explained.

Harry was silent. "Frankly headmaster, you have been failing the trust I have placed in you to this point. I am prepared to extend you more trust as credit, but I need some concessions."

Dumbledore looked up. "I suppose this is in regards to the poorly warded home, or the Mountain Troll that nearly killed you. Ask, and if it is in my power to grant it, I will."

"Well first, I can legally use magic during the holidays. Thus, I don't want any flak for exercising my rights. Second, I work closely with Mr. Ollivander, the Potter family advisor." Dumbledore's face betrayed nothing; no irritation, no shock. "Thus, a place with a secure floo connection so I can come and go to his shop are also non-negotiable. Thirdly, when you do the warding of the property in question, I want to be there so I know what wards are defending me. Finally, Hedwig, my trunk, and my wand are private property and are to be treated as such. I don't want an inspection of them without due cause," he finished.

Dumbledore was silent for a moment. "All that you have asked for seems rather reasonable. Very well, I will compile a list of families I trust and get back to you next week. Now for the second topic," he gestured to the Sorting Hat on his desk.

Harry scooped it up and placed it on his head. The hat proceeded to mentally whack him.

"What did you do that for?" Harry said in his head.

"I said visit me soon. Not whenever you felt like it!" The hat shouted to the world as Dumbledore chuckled.

"All right all right, I'm sorry," Harry apologized. "Can you stop hitting my brain now?"

"Fine," the mental hitting stopped. "So why have you graced me with your presence?" The sarcasm was rather evident.

"Well, I wanted to make a trade. I understand you want to get out of this stuffy office. I am prepared to use my influence with the Headmaster to do just that. However, I require a favor." The hat mentally nodded for him to continue. "Well there is this girl in Gryffindor, Hermione Granger. She seems to have a lot of trouble in that house. So I was wondering if a resorting of some kind was possible."

The hat was silent for a second. "Resortings have been done in the past; once a century on average. I suppose, if the Headmaster gives his approval, I can resort her."

"Thanks, I'll get on it," Harry said as he took off the hat.

"Well Headmaster, before we start, I have two additional requests." Dumbledore nodded for him to continue. "The first is that Hermione Granger of Gryffindor expressed her discomfort with being in that house. I was wondering if a resorting was possible. Alistair is willing to do it as long as we have your approval."

He was thoughtful for a second. "I will speak with Ms. Granger soon, and depending on her thoughts, she may be resorted. Your second request?"

"Well, Alistair expressed his annoyance with being constantly left in this office with no entertainment, and no opportunity to ahem... stretch its legs. So I was wondering if it could be charmed so I could carry it with me until the Christmas holidays." Harry asked.

"That is a much easier request to handle. I will allow that, however, because of its importance as a historical artifact, I need to put a tracking charm on it to ensure its recoverability if harm should befall it. Of course, if Ms. Granger was to be resorted, then I would have to borrow the hat. Would you agree to that?" Dumbledore replied.

Harry nodded, and Dumbledore flicked his wand. He then handed Harry the hat. "Guard him well, Mr. Potter. Now then, for tonight's lesson, I thought we would work on your dodging..."

"Harry m'boy, may I introduce you to Alastor Moody," Slughorn said Sunday morning as Harry arrived outside, as instructed, at 5:30 on the Quidditch pitch.

"So this is Potter," mused Moody. "You're here early. That's good, more time to work. Give me five laps around the pitch. Did I stutter!" he roared.

After ten laps, Moody didn't think the first five were good enough; Moody had him doing a series of stretches. It was around this time Slughorn walked away chuckling. Then it was on to dodging. Harry had had two previous sessions with Dumbledore on the same subject, so he was fairly good at it after spending hours practicing. Still, after a few hours, Harry was completely worn out. Moody forced a pepper-up potion down his throat, and they finally moved on to magic.

"All right Potter, I'm impressed. You haven't run away screaming yet. Now we're moving on to actual dueling spells. Cast every spell you know that is usable in a duel," Moody ordered.

So Harry showed him everything he had: the stunning spell and its counter, the blasting curse, the conjunctivitis curse, the severing charm, the hurling hex, the bombarding hex, the disarming charm, the summoning charm, the banishing charm, the shield charm, the levitation charm, the vanishing spell, the hurling hex, the heatless blasting curse, the extinguishing spell, espiskey, finite incantatem, the flame-freezing charm, the glacius charm, Homenum Revelio, the freezing charm, the impediment jinx, the impervious charm, aqua erecto, aguamenti, the binding spell, the burning hex, the fireball conjuration, the jelly-legs hex, the jelly-finger hex, the wiping charm, the resuscitation charm, the wound cauterizing charm, the leg-locker curse, the body-bind curse, the reductor curse, the releasing charm, the tripping jinx, the silencing charm, the stinging hex, the bludgeoning hex, the flame whip curse, the dark curse shield, the bolt thrower, both shields that blocked both spells and physical assaults, his area effect shield, the duplication charm, the push wave, the disillusionment charm, the lightning bolt conjuration, creating whirlwinds and snowstorms, and the wind blast charm.

After he had finished, Alastor Moody broke out in a wide smile. "Now that is dedication. Horace had said you'd been working hard. Well I've got a few spells to show you. Of course, you know everything you have is useless without some further dedication in transfiguration and charms. Anyway here's what I have for you."

Moody pulled out his wand, and vanished the residue from Harry's spells. Then he started casting. He showed Harry the bird conjuration, avis, and then the creature attack command, oppugno. Then he demonstrated the binding body-bind combo, conligo totalus. After that, he told Harry about banishing himself into the air to gain a height advantage, and showed him two charms, the cushioning charm, spongify, and the slowing charm, arresto momentum. Then he showed Harry the movement charm, mobili- and then the correct suffix. He also demonstrated the control charm, piertotum locomotor, but advised a lot more study in transfiguration before he incorporated that spell. Finally, he demonstrated the most effective shield for blocking spells and physical assaults, the Imprimis Patrocinor. He warned Harry it would probably be a few years before he mastered that shield.

Then he set to work correcting Harry's technique on several of his dueling spells, and showing him better and more creative ways to use them, like the railroad spike as a way to take down shields. All in all, by six, when Moody left, Harry felt like he could sleep a week, his magic was near complete exhaustion, and his heart was still racing like a charioteer. It was all he could do to stumble to Hagrid's hut on the grounds.

Once there, he wearily knocked on the hut's door. Hagrid's beaming face met him, though it quickly turned to shock as he bodily lifted Harry and placed him on a makeshift bed.

"Blimey Harry, what 'appened to you?" he asked.

"More than... twelve hours... training... Alastor Moody," Harry struggled to say. "Gonna... nap." With that he fell into a deep slumber.

He awoke to hear birds chirping, and as he rose, he saw the sun rising over Hogwarts. He looked over to see Hagrid sleeping on his bed. He checked the time: 6:30. He had slept for more than twelve

hours! He quickly hopped out of bed, scribbled Hagrid a note of thanks, and began walking to the castle. Before setting foot inside, he shrouded himself in a disillusionment charm so no one saw him in yesterday's sweaty clothes. He then hiked up to the Ravenclaw dormitories.

An hour later, he'd showered and changed, and was sitting down to catch up with Alistair.

"Where were you last night, Harry?" Alistair asked curiously.

"I spent the night at Hagrid's hut. I was amazed I even made it there in my haze of exhaustion," Harry replied. "Why?"

"Well, I'm due at the Headmaster's office eight this morning, to resort Granger. Honestly, she should have just gone into Ravenclaw the first time, but no, she wanted to prove she was bold and daring like a Gryffindor," the hat ranted.

"Well then, we better get going," said Harry idly as he took the hat and tucked it into his school bag for after the resorting.

It was a fifteen minute walk to the Headmaster's office, during which time Alistair helpfully relayed all the boring comings and goings of Ravenclaw tower the previous night.

Finally they reached the gargoyle, Harry said the password, and they traversed the stairs to the Headmaster's office.

"Enter Harry, Alistair," he heard Dumbledore speak from within. Harry pushed open the door to see Hermione Granger sitting opposite Dumbledore. She looked extremely relieved to see both of them.

"Well here is your hat. I probably should just..." he saw Hermione almost involuntarily shake her head, "Wait outside to see if she becomes a Ravenclaw, so I can help her transition." She beamed a very nervous smile at him.

"Certainly Harry, but before you go, there is something I wanted to discuss. Filius seemed very adamant about having you on the Ravenclaw Quidditch team after he heard about your flying lesson. Have you considered trying out?" Dumbledore asked.

"Well I did consider it, but I decided I'd wait until next year. After all, Henry Douberville, the current Ravenclaw seeker, is a seventh year; the spot will be free next year. Why?" he queried.

"Well, Filius was wondering if you were willing to become the reserve seeker. He wished me to act as an intermediary," Dumbledore explained.

Harry blinked. Was this Dumbledore putting a cherry on top of their accord? Why else would he bring up what Flitwick had said? "I'm honored, but I think the reserve seeker spot should go to someone who is qualified, and who has been training with the team all year. The first Ravenclaw match is at the end of the month, not nearly enough time to get up to scratch."

"None-the-less, if the Ravenclaw team does find itself in need of your immense talents, you are willing and able?" Dumbledore asked.

"I guess," Harry shrugged. "Anyway, I'll wait out in the hall for you two to finish."

He only had to wait five minutes for a smiling Hermione to emerge wearing blue and gold; the colors of Ravenclaw house. "Congratulations and welcome to the house," Harry said, holding out a hand. She ignored it and hugged him tightly.

"Thank you for all your help," she whispered gratefully.

"No problem, Hermione. Come on, let's get to class," said Harry disentangling himself from her.

Harry decided a few days later that having Hermione in Ravenclaw was about as big a boon as having Slughorn teaching potions. It was a little nerve-grinding how she always hung around with him, but from pieces of conversation with her, he decided that she had probably been very lonely as a child. She was very clingy, but in a good way. She always walked with him in the halls, and sat next to him in classes. She finally came around to considering Harry far superior at magic, rather than competition, and she was determined to learn from him. Harry had shown her a few basic dueling spells, like the disarming charm, but had also warned her that without a

good grasp of Occlumency, higher level spells would take much longer to work.

However, certain things he did immediately got him in her good graces. Harry always turned down her offers to help him with his homework, as did Anthony; he made sure to mention she wasn't their friend for her ability to do homework. He also made sure to slightly bolster her self-esteem; her time in Gryffindor and her fights with her housemates had driven it dangerously low. Finally, he also tried to curb some of her habits that would be sure to alienate people, like reciting the textbook. The first few times he'd tried it, she seemed very annoyed, but after Anthony took her aside and explained why he was doing it, her anger vanished immediately. Indeed she had very fast become a close friend of Harry's.

This was fortunate because her growing loyalty to Harry, her academic prowess, and her magical ability made her, objectively, a very useful ally. Hermione had taken to acting as a mediator between himself and Padma, whose hostility seemed to return with the addition of Hermione to Harry's little group. From that, she and Padma had learned to get along, and had developed something akin to friendship. With Padma not acting as an obstacle, the rest of the Ravenclaw girls had lost their apparent hostility as well. Once more, the pendulum of life had swung in his favor.

The thing Hermione did for him, however, was her constant looking up of spells that Harry might find useful. He told her a few times she didn't have to, but she ignored him. The best was that all of the spells she was taking note of for him were in the field of Transfiguration, her best field, and something Harry was set to start working on soon. He had almost finished learning all of the dueling spells, even the *Imprimis Patrocinor* shield Moody assured him would take several years to learn. Transfiguration, and battle transfiguration in particular, were the next frontiers. But for now, he had to curb his learning; it was Quidditch season. True to the Headmaster's word, Flitwick and the Ravenclaw team had come calling.

Harry watched as the seventh year Ravenclaw seeker, Douberville, was carried off the field via stretcher. The Hufflepuff beater accidentally sent a bludger that belted him right in the head. Only Harry's quick *arresto momentum* spell saved his life from the two-

hundred foot fall. And now Captain Davies was looking at him with calculating eyes.

"Potter, go in and play seeker," Davies ordered. "Take Henry's broom, and ride it to victory!"

While deplored Davies motivational skills, Harry grabbed the broom, and launched back into the air with the other Ravenclaw players, amidst announcer Lee Jordan announcing his substitution. The blue and gold section cheered wildly. The score was 90-90, and they were hoping Harry would be able to finally bring the match to an end; the match was getting close to two hours.

Harry had been circling the pitch for five minutes when he saw it, the snitch, fluttering in all its glory near the Gryffindor stands. He looked around to see where the Hufflepuff seeker, Diggory, was, and seeing him near the Ravenclaw goal posts, he began flying towards the Gryffindor section as casually as he could. The snitch hadn't fluttered away, so Harry put on a burst of speed and easily caught it in his outstretched hand. Ravenclaw won 250-100.

However, as Harry was heading for the ground, his broom gave a sudden jerk. Then it began hurling him around. All he could do was hang on for dear life. And try and summon his wand from his school robes. After a few minutes of hanging on, his wand finally came to him. It was a simple matter to throw up a dark curse shield in front of his broom to block whatever was causing it to go haywire. Sure enough, a few seconds after he cast his shield, the broom stopped jerking around, and Harry finally landed on the ground to celebrate with his worried teammates.

They all quickly decided to cut the celebrations short and see Henry. They traveled in worried silence; Henry really looked near death as he was dragged off the pitch. However, they arrived in the hospital wing to see Henry awake and about.

"Henry," said Roger clapping him on the shoulder. "We won! How are you feeling?"

He shook his head. "Much better, but my mum was in a right state. Er' Roger... I love the sport and all, but I'm with her on this one. I resign as Ravenclaw seeker, effective immediately. Keep my broom."

"Your new seeker," he smiled at Harry, "Can use it. Thanks Harry, if it weren't for you, I doubt I'd be up and about."

"Are you sure?" Roger asked worriedly.

"Roger, he caught the snitch, didn't he? I didn't. He's willing to assume the risk that comes with playing seeker? I'm not. Therefore, he's your seeker, and I'm just a seventh year trying hard to pass my NEWTS," Henry replied firmly.

"If you're sure," Roger replied uncertainly. He turned to Harry. "You'd consent to be our starting seeker?"

"Sure," Harry replied with a smile.

"Take good care of my Cleansweep 7, Harry," Henry said. "And good luck."

"So you're the new Ravenclaw seeker?" Anthony asked once Harry had rejoined his friends and finished explaining the afternoon's events.

Harry nodded, and began receiving congratulations from all the members of his group. Save Hermione.

"Something on your mind, Hermione?" Harry asked, having become very familiar with that facial expression.

"What happened with your broom?" she asked worriedly.

"I think someone was hexing it. Once I had my wand, I cast a shield around myself, and the hex stopped," Harry confessed.

"Any idea who?" asked Neville.

"No, but after this and the troll, methinks paranoia will be a good companion for the immediate future," Harry said. "Look it's a cold day, we're all worried, and I'm rather tired. Let's go to Hagrid's."

They followed Harry to Hagrid's hut. He knocked a few times, and was met by Fang, Hagrid's boarhound, who'd taken a liking to Harry. "Back Fang, get back!" Hagrid shouted, pulling the energetic boarhound off of Harry.

"Why does Fang hate me so?" asked Harry sarcastically as he took a seat. Hagrid smiled, and began preparing tea.

"So how have you been, Hagrid?" Harry asked.

"Fine, Dumbledore was considering trying to groom me to take over the Care of Magical Creatures post. And," he lowered his voice, "I managed a breakthrough with our little project."

"Really, how far have you gotten?" Harry asked excitedly. When he had tea with Hagrid the third week of term, he'd asked the giant about his problems with magic. Hagrid told him about his poor proficiency with spells. Harry had told him about getting in touch with his magic; something achievable only with wandless magic.

Hagrid held out a huge hand, and his teapot from across the room soared into his hand. Harry ignored the gasps around the room. "Congrats, Hagrid."

"Thanks Harry. I was really touched by all the time you spent teaching me that," he replied, as he began pouring tea into their glasses.

"So Hagrid and I don't want to turn this joyous day uncomfortable but... you must have noticed my broom troubles at the end of the match." Hagrid nodded. "We," he gestured to all of his friends, "Suspect a hex of some type. Did you see anything unusual?"

Hagrid shook his head. "I didn't see nuthin' Harry. As a matter o fact, at the end of the match, I was leaving to go feed Fluffy." He looked horrified as he let slip the last bit.

"Fluffy? Isn't that the Cerberus you encountered? He's close by! Awesome, I always wanted to see a Cerberus!" Harry replied eagerly.

"Unfortunately Harry, he's a bit busy guarding the-" Hagrid stopped himself.

"I'm sorry Hagrid, I didn't hear you," Harry said.

"I didn't say nuthin'. You're not involved! It's between Dumbledore and Flamel-" he clapped a hand over his mouth to stop speaking further, and glared at Harry.

Harry rubbed his head. "Please tell me you didn't mean Nicolas Flamel, Hagrid? Please, tell me this doesn't involve NICOLAS FLAMEL!" Hagrid and everyone else in the hut flinched as in Harry's anger he manifested a visible aura. "Do you have any idea how long I had to listen to him bitch and moan about leaving his stone in Dumbledore's possession? You'd think after 660 years he'd be a bit more mellow and easygoing. But no; he was pissed about Dumbledore taking it for protection. Great, now I have to go see and curse out the Headmaster. Thanks for the cuppa Hagrid."

"Congratulations on your fine catch Saturday, and on becoming the new Ravenclaw seeker," Dumbledore said genially.

Harry was having none of it. "I fear professor we need to have a discussion today, and that discussion won't be a particularly pleasant one," he said neutrally.

"What is the matter, Harry?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"Your friend Nicolas," he saw understanding flash across Dumbledore's weathered face, "Yes, that Nicolas. Well, I met him over the summer, and he's not happy with you for messing with his stone. In light of the fact that Saturday was what I believe to be the second attempt on my life this year, I am going to ask that, it can even be done in secret if you so choose, you send him back his Stone before someone finally kills me in a desperate, harebrained attempt that involves laying hands on the stone in question. I'm almost certain the stone is the real target."

Dumbledore's face fell, almost comically if the situation weren't so grim. "Do you really believe dark forces could penetrate the castle and make a play for the stone, Harry?" he asked worriedly.

"If 'dark forces' can let a troll into the castle, or hex my broom, why does it seem like such a stretch for these same forces to attempt to acquire the stone. Now, while I'm sure the defenses on the third floor, yes I did work that out, are adequate, or whatever your old, demented mind considers adequate, there seems to be too much risk without enough reason. You could even put a fake in its place if

need be. Nonetheless, you are playing with fire by having such a powerful magical artifact so close by. I just don't want to see you get burned," Harry finished succinctly.

Dumbledore was silent for a moment. "I understand your concern, and I can arrange for the stone to be moved. However, as you know from dealing with Horace; there is a price."

"Name it," said Harry simply.

"I have been working diligently to find a new summer residence for you. In lieu of all of my information, I believe I have found the best location. My friends and allies, the Weasleys, live in Devon. I was in touch with Arthur and Molly about the possibility of you residing there during your summer holidays. My price is your agreement to this location," Dumbledore explained.

"Well I would, but there are a few things that concern me about this arrangement. First, and I would never take stock in anything he says otherwise, but Draco Malfoy has indicated, through taunts and insults in the hall, that the family is rather poor. That wouldn't be a problem otherwise, but when the prime concern is feeding a family, how much of a secondary concern are the protective wards?" Harry asked reasonably.

"I would be doing the warding, Harry," Dumbledore reminded him.

"True, but I've done some reading up on wards of that sort. My concern is the magical protections you intend to place may in fact overload the ward matrix, if it was crafted out of, er... substandard material," Harry replied.

"What would you have me do?" Dumbledore asked.

"The Potter family, even after two wars in the last century depleted their coffers, is not a poor family. I would be willing to pay for the highest level of protection," Harry replied.

"If you are so insistent, it can be done," Dumbledore replied.

"Now then, the second thing is this: do the Weasleys know that I spend a lot of time training and with Mr. Ollivander?" Harry asked.

"Yes, your immense workload has been made clear to them. They are still not deterred from welcoming you into their home," Dumbledore replied.

"I'm touched. The final thing is this: is there anyone I can talk to for a... friendlier review of the family. Friendlier than, say Draco's snide comments?" Harry asked.

"As it happens, the Weasleys have seven children. Two, Bill and Charles, have graduated, while four of their children currently attend the school: Percival, Fred, George, and Ronald Weasley. Ronald is in your year, a Gryffindor. The seventh child, young Ginerva, is scheduled to start Hogwarts next year," Dumbledore recited.

"Then I am willing to agree to this. However, please sir, get the stone out of Hogwarts!" he took a breath. "So what are we working on this evening?"

"I feel Harry that the time has come for us to delve into the fine art of Transfiguration. Now then get out your wand and..." Dumbledore began issuing instructions.

"Would you two be Fred and George Weasley?" Harry asked the pair of red headed twins as he sat down at the Gryffindor table for breakfast.

The pair swapped looks. "That depends,"

"Ickle Harrykins,"

"On what this is,"

"About!" They finished together.

"Well I'd love to speak here, but the walls have eyes, ears, and noses. Is there perhaps somewhere else we could have a discussion?" Harry asked.

Another set of looks. "Follow us." They said getting up from the table.

A five minute walk and they were in a deserted classroom. "So what can we..."

"Do for you?" After spending so much time with Slughorn, Harry could appreciate the twins' special brand of insanity.

"Well gents, and I do use that term loosely," they grinned, "My summer arrangements have... become undone. Consequently, the Headmaster has been on the lookout for a new place to crash during the summer holidays. He recommended your family."

The twins looked awestruck by the Headmaster giving his seal of approval to their family. "So what can we do for you?"

"Before I agree, I need some information. First, what is the surrounding countryside like?" he saw the quizzical looks on their faces, "He told me you lived in rural Devon."

"Lots of land, most of it free of anything but trees, good to play pick-up Quidditch" answered Fred.

"We are surrounded by some witches and wizards as neighbors," George chimed in.

"Yeah, the Lovegoods, Diggory's, and a few other families I can't remember," finished Fred.

"But lots of wooded area for Quidditch practice," George reiterated.

"I take it there would be a lot of space to practice my dueling technique," Harry mused. "Okay, next question: what is the town... Otter St. something, like?"

"Nice, quiet, and peaceful!" they replied in unison. "Oh yeah, and it's Ottery St. Catchpole."

"Here's my final query. What is your family like?" Harry asked.

They glanced at each other again. "Well, from oldest to youngest..." They took a breath, "Our mother is extremely overprotective, a regular mother hen, but a good soul, and sometimes very supportive."

"Even if she does grate on our nerves occasionally," George pointed out, and Fred nodded stoically.

"Our father is an odd duck, so to speak. He likes to mess with muggle electronics. He works in the Misuse of Muggle Artefacts office. Very tolerant and easygoing person," Fred finished.

"Our oldest brother, Bill, works as a cursebreaker for Gringotts. He's really talented, and just... cool," George gushed.

"Charlie works as a dragon tamer in Romania. Our parents and our little sister are paying him a visit during the Christmas holidays. We reckon he's a bit dim to want to spend so much time with dragons," Fred continued.

"Not my preferred career, but if he likes it, I don't see the harm," Harry replied.

The twins laughed merrily. "All right, continuing on, next is Percy..."

"The Prefect!" all three said in unison. Harry was very familiar with the title Fred and George had bestowed on him.

After they had all finished laughing, George resumed. "Yes Percy, professional arse-kisser, serious student, and prefect extraordinaire. The adopted son, we reckon."

"Oh, let me. Then there are the talented pair of rogues, the deadly duo, the mischievous Weasley twins, latter day disciples to the code of the Marauders," Harry laughed at his own joke, but missed the looks Fred and George were giving him.

"What?" he said to their looks of complete awe.

"How do you know about the Marauders?" they asked in unison.

"Code of the Marauders: Live fast, Strike hard, and leave chaos in your wake (credited to jbern in The Lie I've Lived). My father pulled it all together from the tattered suggestions Padfoot and Moony threw around," Harry replied. That conversation was perhaps the funniest one Harry read from his father's journal.

He finally noticed that Fred and George were on their knees in front of him, bowing down. "We're not worthy! We're not worthy!" they were chanting in monotone.

"Rise, my loyal servants," Harry commanded jokingly. They rose, and Fred fished a piece of parchment. "Is that...?" Harry walked over to it. He pulled out his wand. "I solemnly swear I am up to no good.

Lines appeared magically from the point his wand hit the text. He stared down at the mobile map of the castle his father and friends had worked so hard to design.

"Fred, George, I believe this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship," Harry said, as he wiped the map clean and handed it back.

"Er, where were we? Ah yeah... Ron," George seemed uncertain how to proceed.

Fred picked up where he left off. "Yeah Ron, well... Bill has curse-breaking, Charlie has dragons, Percy has power-mongering, we have pranks, and our little sister has an obsession with a certain green-eyed wizard." Harry shook his head to bat away the unpleasant images. "Ron hasn't found his calling yet. As such he's rather... unmotivated."

"Finally, there is Ginny; our sweet, delicate, and sometimes devious little sister. Who seems rather smitten with someone in this room who isn't one of her brothers," George finished.

"A... fangirl? Really? Well, I suppose I could live with that. Knowing your family, would my living there cause any problems?" Harry asked.

The twins shrugged. "Your independent streak would probably drive our mum spare, our father would pick your brain constantly about the muggle world, Percy would probably force you to be his study partner at some point, we would prank the living daylights out of you, Ron would try and get you to slack off with him, and Ginny would squeak and run away from you. So no, you'd fit right in," they finished. Harry was amazed by their ability to speak in unison. Must be a spell of some kind

"Well, then gents, I look forward to the summer holidays. However, I must run. See you around," Harry said opening the door and heading to class.

Chapter Eight: The Gambit

"Concentrate, Harry. You need to be able to conjure a material shield on a whim," Dumbledore lectured.

Harry had been learning about conjuring shields of ice, wood, stone, and many other materials. This session was a review of many materials Harry had learned to conjure. Dumbledore was testing his speed, maneuverability, and conjuration this evening by systematically smashing his shields apart. Right after this test exercise, they were going to move on to marble and metal wall conjuration.

"You did well, Harry," said Dumbledore as he smashed apart his final stone shield. "Here let's take a breather."

Harry gratefully retook his seat opposite the Headmaster's desk. Constantly conjuring shields only for the purpose of refining them was very draining. His body was drenched in sweat from his exertions at so much advanced magic. What he really wanted to do was go to bed and sleep for the next twenty hours or so...

"I must say Harry, even your father couldn't have managed this exercise until well into his sixth year, and he was one of the most talented Transfiguration students to grace these halls. I don't believe I could have handled this until my third year. Yet here you are, not even halfway to twelve, and handling this much better than many adult wizards," Dumbledore mused.

"Thank you sir. I wanted to ask you a few questions, yet I fear they might... put a damper on our relationship," Harry said choosing his words carefully.

"Ask away, Harry," Dumbledore replied.

"Thank you. First, I understand about the blood protection the Dursleys gave me, but why did you supersede my parents' will and not place me with the Longbottoms?" Harry asked.

"In hindsight, considering how weak the blood wards turned out to be, I should have, but I truly believed that those wards were the best protection you could have had. I also wanted to make certain you did not grow up in the wizarding world; I have seen too many

talented wizards caught up in the sea of arrogance, and I hoped that by placing you with your relations, you would be safe and happy, but not forced to grow up too quickly to cater to the whims of the Wizarding World," Dumbledore explained. Harry inwardly frowned... Dumbledore had so little faith in his character he'd placed him with relations possessing a less than pleasant demeanor to make sure he'd turned out... "right"!

"The other question I have, and I mean no disrespect to him, but why was Hagrid sent to introduce me to the wizarding world?" Harry asked in a voice of forced calm.

"I believed that the blood wards would be so powerful, only someone with magical resistance, like Hagrid, would be able to traverse them," Dumbledore explained. "I must admit that when I returned from my ICW meeting, I was initially very angry to hear that Hagrid had left you in Diagon Alley. That was before Hagrid revealed to me where exactly he had located you, the hut on the rock, and the conditions he suspected you grew up in. Yet again, it is that wonderful gift of hindsight that makes me grateful for Hagrid's actions. Now then, if that is all, we should get back to the lesson," Dumbledore finished, standing up. Harry got up; every time he'd ventured to talk with Dumbledore, he became further convinced that the Headmaster was either deliberately hiding things from him, or had even engaged in willful manipulation towards some grand end only he could see. Either way, Dumbledore definitely needed to be watched more closely.

"Harry, why are you limping?" Hermione asked him as he strolled into the Ravenclaw common room.

"We were practicing shielding tonight. One of Dumbledore's bludgeoners caught me in the leg," Harry explained, sitting down next to her.

Anthony snorted from the chair next to Harry. "Aren't bludgeoners the slowest spells that are used in duels?" he asked. Hang around with Harry, and you did pick things up, especially concerning dueling.

"Yeah. That's probably why the headmaster sent ten at a time," Harry remarked idly.

Anthony's eyes widened. "Your shielding took nine hits from Dumbledore?" he whispered.

"No we were practicing conjuration shielding. Each conjured shield is only good for two or three hits. My first two shields, wood and ice, took two hits each, while my first stone shield took three, but my second stone shield only took two, hence the bludgeoner to the leg," Harry said rubbing it.

"You do know conjuration is a NEWT's Transfiguration topic?" asked Hermione curiously, and with more than a hint of awe in her voice. Hermione's awe wasn't uncommon among people who knew what activities Harry was engaging in. At a time when every other Hogwarts student was kicking back and taking it easy, unless they had OWL's or NEWT's that year, he was working at an increasingly faster pace.

"Doesn't hurt to start early," Harry commented. He pulled his bag out and began leafing through a book Dumbledore had lent him on metal conjuration. "I thought metal conjuration was a magical impossibility?" Hermione asked.

"Hermione, this is magic we're talking about. Does it seem logical that such a powerful force has limitations like no conjuring gold or food?" Harry asked. "You know that some cultures eat cats, right?" She nodded. "Well, if I transfigured something into a cat, or even just conjured it, and then killed it, it would remain a cat. Technically, I would have conjured food."

Hermione's jaw dropped at the enormity of the magical loophole. Professor McGonagall had introduced the basics of Gamp's laws of elemental transfiguration during their last class.

Harry returned to his reading. Hermione and Anthony were working on a potion's essay due in a few days that Harry had already tackled. He needed to get that essay out of the way to get back to work. Really, the things he was learning were all practical things on the school curriculum. Or, perhaps it would be better to say, older versions of the school curriculum. Many, many students at Hogwarts did not really work to full capacity. Instead, they were content to do the week's assignment, and the week's readings, and nothing more. Which was fine for them, but unfortunately, he had a Dark lord in the not-so far off future that needed to be killed. Anything he was

learning at this point, Voldemort had probably learned and mastered several times over. Really, he was struggling to catch up. He'd been studying his ass off for half a year, and he still probably knew 10-15% of what Riddle knew. Worse, Tom had been as much of an obsessive worker as he was...

"Harry?" he heard Hermione say nervously after a half hour of silence.

"What can I do for you, Hermione?" he said marking his place and safely derailing his train of thought.

"Well, you might remember that during the last Slug club meeting, professor Slughorn told us about his Christmas party." Harry nodded for her to continue. "We were supposed to bring dates. I'm not really that eager to start dating already, but... I was wondering if you'd go with me."

Harry thought for a second. There was a part of him, as large as Russia, which would rather not deal with this right now- or ever, for that matter. But he couldn't see the harm. "Sure, why not?"

Hermione beamed back at him and hugged him. "Thanks Harry! Oh I'm so excited."

She grabbed her bag and literally skipped upstairs. Harry looked over at Anthony. "What on earth was that?" he said in regards to Hermione's uncharacteristic behavior. Anthony just shrugged and went back to his essay.

"Now then Harry, you can already conjure birds, snakes, shields, and railroad spikes. So today we're going to work on a few more powerful animals. Now then, take out your wand and copy these motions," Slughorn lectured. The professor had volunteered his free Thursday night to work with his favorite student.

Harry had broached marble and metal shields with the headmaster, but bigger animal transfiguration and conjuration had not yet been covered. That was why he so appreciated that Slughorn was showing him how to properly conjure a lion.

The professor demonstrated a few times, and then Harry set to work trying to transfigure a piece of stone into a lion. Harry swished,

flicked, and put as much magic into the transfiguration as he could, but still he didn't conjure the lion. He managed a few lion-like animals that either died after a few seconds, or were missing critical body parts, like paws.

"That was pretty good for a first time. I see your workload has really paid off. Lion transfigurations are beyond NEWT material, and yet you seem close to getting it," Slughorn complimented him. He poured two glasses as Harry took a seat opposite him.

"Thank you sir," said Harry as he took the glass of amber liquid. He took a sip; it was very sweet and honey-like.

"So, excited for my Christmas party this Saturday?" Slughorn asked warmly.

"Yes I am. It sounds like a lot of fun," Harry replied. What else was he supposed to say to the professor who'd been so much help?

"What's this I hear about you coming with Ms. Granger? Is love in the air for little Harry Potter?" Slughorn teased.

"Nah, we're just going as friends," Harry replied easily. Love! Really now!

"Harry, I have no idea what it's like to be in your shoes. Eleven, and already a celebrity known around the world, and on top of that, rumored to be the next Albus Dumbledore. But here's a little advice, though I think you aren't old enough to appreciate it yet: Behind every great man is a woman. You need a companion, a trusted confidant, a foil for all your ideas, or else life on this great ball of dirt will seem rather cold and empty. I hope you someday put my advice to good use," Slughorn said as he leaned back.

"Thank you for the advice professor, but I think you're right; I'm not yet old enough to appreciate it. I will keep it in mind, though," Harry said as he took another sip of his beverage.

"All right, break's over. Back to the grind, Harry. Now then, make your movements more precise..."

He had done it! He had finally done it! After months and months of careful planning, his labors had borne fruit. Dumbledore's worthless

defenses, which in the end had amounted to a dog lulled to sleep by music, a plant that burned like any other, flying keys without an anti-summoning charm, giant chess pieces which served as target practice, a troll... really a troll- the old fool had kept his suggestion, and a potions puzzle that could be avoided with a simple flame freezing charm. All of which was protected by a very feeble, very outdated (rather like the old fool, now that he thought about it) warding scheme that had been so simplistic in nature that he might well have contracted with a child for the job. And now he was standing in front of the final defense, an ornate mirror, and the stone was in reach. All he had to do was reach out and... his hand softly hit glass. Hmm.

He tried one more time to reach out and take the stone. Damnation! Perhaps the old man was saving his best defense, his only worthy defense, for the end of the game. He read the inscription. Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi. What on Earth could that mean- Of course... of course. For a second there, he thought that perhaps the Headmaster had displayed a code designed to delay him. Not that the old bastard would ever know of course. But once again, he'd overestimated Dumbledore.

I show not your face but your heart's desire. Except... he looked into the mirror again. Now, more than anything, he desired the stone. It was the coup de grace... the most important piece in his design to return to the living once more! Of course it was his Heart's Desire! And yet, he couldn't touch it. The mirror continually taunted him with possessing the stone and being restored... or perhaps even creating large, majestic piles of gold, maybe even a throne for himself once he'd finally secure Britain underneath his foot. Well, there had to be a way to beat this...

Four hours later, he'd been proved wrong. He tried summoning the stone, using rituals to deactivate the mirror, disable the mirror's magic, summoning a demon to possess the mirror and retrieve the stone. He'd even contemplated smashing the mirror and grabbing the stone from the wreckage. But he'd dismissed that idea... Dumbledore's precious artifact's destruction would probably bypass his ward nullification and alert the old fool. He wasn't that desperate... yet. He still had time, lots of time, before his curse forced him from the school.

Finally, as the hour grew early, and students and staff might start getting themselves up and ready for the new day, he turned and left the blasted chamber. He refused to believe the old man had secured the stone and thrown away the key. There was a solution out there. There had to be- wait a second! A truly malicious smile flickered across his "face." Was it likely that the old man had thrown away the key to attaining the stone? No! However, it was likely that Dumbledore had secured the key on the person of an unsuspecting soul he valued more than many others. He'd probably given the answer he now so desperately sought to the Boy-Who-Lived...

"You look very nice, Hermione," Harry said when he met her to go down to Slughorn's Christmas party. She wore a pink dress, and a very nervous smile. Harry had donned a set of dress robes that went well with his eyes.

"Thanks Harry," said Hermione nervously.

Harry interlocked arms. "Shall we?" He was so thanking Ollivander for whatever he did that killed his nervousness, or else he probably would have jumped off the tower.

They walked through the oddly silent Hogwarts halls and eventually arrived at Slughorn's office. A knock and the door opened to show a beaming professor Slughorn.

"Harry m'boy, Ms. Granger, come in, the party's just getting started." He stepped aside to allow both of them into his festively decorated office. Baubles and mistletoe hung from the rafters, and in one corner was a very beautifully decorated Christmas tree.

"Nice decorations, professor," Harry commented idly.

"Thank you, Harry. Eldred and Alastor are supposed to be here tonight you know," he commented.

Harry's eyes lit up. "Excellent professor. Well, I must go make my rounds."

"Eldred? Alastor?" Hermione asked once they had walked away.

"Eldred Worple and Alastor Moody. Worple was Slughorn's first guest, I'm sure you remember, and I wanted to ask him about ways

to deal with vampires, while Moody will probably attack me and then give me a lecture on 'Constant Vigilance', " Harry explained.

"Not tonight, Potter," Harry whipped around with his wand in hand. "Good you're learning," Moody complimented.

"I actually saw you from the reflection of that mirror," said Harry pointing to Slughorn's buffet table. As Moody looked away, Harry swiped his wand before he could react. "Are you crazy? Falling for the oldest trick in the book. Better people than you have been killed for less! Constant Vigilance, Alastor!" Harry recited as he handed back Moody's wand with a grin. Let's see if the grizzled ex-auror appreciated his lectures as much when he was on the receiving end.

"Well my young apprentice, you'll be pleased to know that Albus invited me to the castle for a Merry Christmas. Be up and at the Quidditch pitch for 5 on Monday. Then we'll see about Constant Vigilance," Moody growled as he walked away.

Harry audibly gulped. "I hope you have a Merry Christmas Hermione, because this will probably be the last time you see me alive," Harry responded faintly. Wasn't there a blizzard on the way! Moody was going to force him to train in that!

"I think this is a lesson to be careful what you wish for, Harry," Hermione teased him.

"Harry!" he looked around to see who called out to him.

"Hey Nev! Susan!" He clapped Neville on the shoulder. "How are you two doing?"

"Can't complain, Harry," Susan replied neutrally. "How about you?"

"Well I'm doing fine considering Alastor Moody is probably going to kill me on Monday. Hermione?" he gave her the floor.

"I'm fine. I hope I did really well on our midyear exams," she replied.

"Hermione, I'm pretty sure you have nothing to worry about," Harry responded dryly. He'd told her several times that she was a very

clever witch who really knew the material, so she had no reason to be worried. Still she was nervous about the exams.

"Harry, is it a shock I want to do well?" she half asked, half accused.

"Not at all, but I don't think the stress is good for you. The exams are over and done with, and any additional discomfort it causes you won't heighten or lower your grade," Harry responded.

Susan interrupted her obligatory tirade. "Hermione let's get some drinks," said Susan as she dragged her away. Harry looked at her oddly for leaving so abruptly.

"How are you doing Nev?" Harry asked the silent boy.

"I'm having a good time, but Susan seems very nervous for some reason. I think she dragged Hermione away to discuss 'girl trouble,'" Neville replied.

"Well, let's give them all the time and space they require. Come on, I want to have a chat with Worple," Harry said.

Neville followed him over to the corner where Eldred Worple and his companion Sanguini were chatting with one of Slughorn's guests.

The guest wandered off just before Harry engaged him in conversation. "Hello again, Mr. Worple."

He looked from Harry to Neville. "Mr. Potter, Mr. Longbottom; what a pleasure. What can I do for you this evening?"

"Well, sir, I still remember your lecture about the Vampire colonies, and I wanted to ask you again how best to subdue a vampire or perhaps a group in the case of hostilities?" Harry said.

"Well, you have to understand, Mr. Potter, that there is no foolproof method. There are many varying circumstances, such as fighting a group, or defensive warding, which can make the academically listed methods worthless. That said, blood-freezing hexes are generally your best bet against individuals. Of course, if there is no way to properly subdue them, then fire or artificial sunlight will do the trick," he replied.

"How did you become interested in vampires?" Neville piped in.

"Well, during my seventh year at Hogwarts, I received an apprenticeship to a charms master who, at the time, lived a little outside Vilnius. Back in those days, it was obligatory for Seventh year students to take some time away from school and gain experience in their prospective fields. That program has since ended due to budget cuts and the Dark Lord. Anyway, after a few days of preparation- packing up, saying goodbyes, that sort of thing- I set out for Vilnius. These were the days of the Cold War, so apparating from Britain to Lithuania would have gotten me arrested by the KGB faster than you can even say their name. So, at the border between Switzerland and Austria, I completed the paperwork, and continued on my way. Of course, as a "Western" I was forbidden the privilege of apparating on the basis that I might illegally transport people back across the iron curtain."

"Anyway, I'd taken two portkeys on my journey: One from Paris to Vienna, and then after the paperwork was done, one from Vienna to Bialystok, Poland. After arriving in Bialystok, I discovered I had no other choice but to either go by foot, or try and find one of those muggle vehicles to take me there. I chose the first. And along the way, I ran into Vampires."

"Well you can imagine my state. I was a young man- not even out of Hogwarts, and before I know it, I'm in the middle of a Vampire camp. But the Vampire Ancient of the Camp was generous and hospitable. I'd displayed no hostility, and so he invited me to have a cup of tea with him. For the record, never even think, in the presence of Vampires, about that old superstition concerning them only drinking blood. Yes, it nourishes and sustains them. However, many, many Vampires have switched from human blood to cattle blood. With the Ancient's tea, I remember he sprinkled in a little cattle blood. Come to think of it, I believe his name was Vladislav. Anyway, Vladislav entertained me and told me all about Vampires. For what reason, I never found out. But he gave me shelter for the night, and in the morning, I set out to finally meet the charms master. But when I'd gotten there, I'd learned there was an outbreak of Dragon Pox in the wizard community, and that he'd perished. Obviously, I'd come all this way there, and I was still required to gain some experience in something, so I turned around and journeyed back to the Vampire camp. Once there, I begged Vladislav to allow me to study

Vampires. He agreed, and my interest only increased from there. And the rest, as they say, is history."

Harry shifted his gaze to see that many others had wandered over to listen to Worple. Before any attention could turn to him, he swiftly cut in. "That was an extremely thrilling tale. Thank you for your time, sir. Have a nice evening and you too, Master Sanguini," he said as they walked off, leaving Worple with a crowd of inquisitive admirers.

As they were walking over towards Slughorn, someone tripped and fell onto Harry.

"Oomph, I'm sorry. It's all Cedric's fault," the dark haired Hufflepuff gushed as she lifted herself off of Harry.

"Tonks don't blame me," the third year Hufflepuff replied as he lifted Harry to his feet.

"Hello Cedric," Harry said as he shook his hand. "And you as well, Nymphadora." Harry's wandless shield charm deflected her stinging hex. "I do believe you are a touch too sensitive about your name, madam," Harry remarked airily.

"How are you doing Harry?" said Cedric.

"Better now that I'm not sprawled on the ground with a beautiful woman on top of me. No wait, actually, I think I'm worse off," Harry replied.

Tonks blushed and she rounded on Cedric. "Why can't you compliment me like that?"

Neville laughed as Tonks pulled her wand and tried to hex Cedric again. He narrowly dodged her stinging hex

"How is Andromeda doing, Tonks?' Harry asked.

"My mother's doing well. Actually, she's seemed really happy of late. She told me to wish Lord Black, whoever he is, a Merry Christmas, and that he would be at Slughorn's Christmas party," Tonks said offhandedly.

"Indeed. Well, I am here," Harry said.

Tonks stared at him. "You're Lord Black?"

"I was the next eligible male due to my grandmother being Dorea Potter nee Black," Harry recited.

"Well that explains how I'm considered a member of the Black family," she replied. "Anyone else had taken the title and we would never have been readmitted."

"Yes, I'm awesome, and the Black family generally isn't," Harry said.
"Well, have a nice night and Merry Christmas, and wish your parents the same for me. Good night."

They finally made it to Slughorn. "Hey professor, are you having a nice evening?" Harry said once he had his attention.

"It is very enjoyable, but I hope next year to have more of the old crowd come out," Slughorn replied wistfully. "Where is Ms. Granger?"

"Hermione went off with Susan a little ago," Harry answered.

"Well Harry, your night won't be as happy if your date's night isn't happy," Slughorn chided.

"Yes sir," Harry agreed as he walked away with Neville in tow.

He walked over towards the drinks table. Hermione and Susan were nowhere to be seen. But there was a sheet of parchment on the table, next to two glasses. Harry recognized one of the glasses as being filled with Pumpkin juice; Hermione's favorite drink.

"Nev, what is Susan's favorite drink?" Harry asked.

"Butterbeer, I think," Neville replied.

He looked at the second glance. It appeared to be filled with butterbeer, if the coloration was any indication. So if the glasses were filled with their date's favorite drinks, did that mean the parchment had a message for them?

Harry looked around, to make sure no one else was watching. Come to think of it, from over here, no one else in the room could really see them. Dismissing this thought, Harry gently moved the glasses aside, and flipped over the parchment. His eyes widened and his heart clenched as he read.

Hello Potter,

Did you think you truly won? That you, a mere infant, could ever defeat me? Does it depress you to know how wrong you were? Tonight, you will help me return to power. Go to the 3rd floor corridor, and come see your friends. And perhaps, if you are quick enough, you can perform a task that will give them a few more moments to live. If you aren't quick enough, then they shall die in painful agony. This, I can assure you. The clock is ticking, so make your choice soon.

Lord Voldemort

Harry wordlessly handed the note to Neville, his mind on overdrive. Lord Voldemort was here, in the school! He thought he had time-time to prepare; DAMN IT! He had Susan and Hermione! He remembered Susan's behavior during the evening; could she have been under the Imperious Curse? That thought morphed into another: How could he have infiltrated the school?

"Harry what are we going to do?" Neville whispered urgently, removing him from his thoughts. "He's back, and he's going to kill Susan and Hermione!"

"Neville, I'm going go after them. Take this note- DON'T ARGUE! Take this note to Moody and Dumbledore, and maybe even Slughorn. I'm going to need reinforcements. Go now!" he urged Neville.

Neville sprinted away as Harry headed for the exit. He was running as fast as he could to the third floor corridor. His mind was trying, and mostly failing, to grasp at answers to his many questions. He finally reached the third-floor corridor door, and sprinted through. He opened the door to see the Cerberus Hagrid had so lovingly spoken of, Fluffy, dead, two heads partially severed, lying in a pool of its own blood. The trapdoor stood open in front of it. He considered for a second changing into raven form, but rejected the idea just in case

there were still active traps residing below. That debate resolved, Harry jumped through it without a second thought.

He cast arresto momentum to slow his fall. He barely registered the remnants of the plant as he sprinted past. The door was off its hinges in the next room, so Harry ran through as well, and then past the multi-colored black and white rubble littering the room after. The smell of the dead troll did make him pause, but he barreled past that as well. It was only in the flame chamber, where the doorways on opposite side became covered in black and blue flames respectively that he finally stopped. He cast the flame-freezing charm on himself and, praying that it worked, strolled through the black flames.

He arrived in the final chamber to see a gigantic mirror opposite him, standing floor to ceiling, with the words, Erisèd stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi.

"Welcome, Harry Potter," he heard to his left. Harry turned to see Susan and Hermione, bound and gagged, with several cuts and bruises, and wide, fearful eyes, leaning against the wall. Right next to them, and pointing his wand right at them, was professor Quirrell.

The legilimency probe, his fainting after alerting the school to the troll in their midst, his turban; it all made sense now. Really, how had he missed it?

"So I'm guessing the turban really wasn't from an African prince," Harry said, trying to keep the fear and disgust in his voice to a bare minimum. Perhaps if he kept Quirrell talking, Neville would have time to collect reinforcements.

"Foolish boy. My master desired I wear it to conceal his presence," Quirrell declared triumphantly.

"So is this the part where you tell me that you let in the troll, and tried to hex my broom?" Harry asked.

"Indeed. However, your constant lessons with that old fool prevented him from discovering me. For that I thank you. Now retrieve the stone, or I kill your friends," Quirrell commanded.

Harry walked up to the mirror. He saw only his reflection. Then his reflection winked, and reached into his pocket to pull out a rough,

blood red stone. It placed it back in its pocket, and Harry felt the stone drop into the pocket of his dress robes. He pulled the stone out.

"So is this what you want?" Harry said, as he pulled his wand from under his sleeve. "What happens if I destroy it?" He pointed his wand at the fake stone.

"I will kill your friends. I think a taster is in order. Crucio!" he pointed his wand at Hermione who writhed in agony. "I will stop, if you just hand me the stone. You can save them, Harry."

"Perhaps I believe in "The Greater Good." Perhaps I am willing to sacrifice them to stop your return. Or maybe not; are you willing to gamble? Know this: if you torture them once more, I destroy the stone," Harry declared.

There was a long moment no one moved. Finally, a voice, as cold as a blizzard, came from the back of Quirrell's turban. "Let me speak with him, face to face."

"Master, you are not strong enough!" Quirrell countered.

"I have strength enough for this," the same cold voice responded.

Slowly, Quirrell reached up and undid his turban. He turned around to show Harry the horrible face imprinted in the back of his head.

"Harry Potter... Do you see what I have become? Mere shadow and vapor... reduced to something less than the meanest ghost. Yet still, there are those willing to let me into their hearts and minds... I still live. I can still retain form when I share another's body. And once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own... to return greater and more terrible than ever before. But of course, this grand vision isn't possible unless you hand me the stone," Voldemort finished.

Harry came to a decision. "Their lives for the stone," he said quietly as he gripped his wand.

Quirrellmорт was silent for a moment. He waved his wand and the bindings fell off. Harry levitated the stone to him. As Quirrell reached for it, Harry dispelled the levitation charm, causing the stone to

clatter to the ground, as he summoned Hermione and Susan towards him.

"It's a fake," Harry declared.

Quirrell stared at him, and then shouted "Avada Kedavra", as a green ray of light shot at Harry.

He flicked his wand and a stone wall appeared between him and the curse. Harry shot two railroad ties at Quirrell, who dived out of the way, as he sent a black curse at Susan. "Protego Horribilis" he intoned in his head to shield Susan. The black curse was blocked by the shield. Harry felt a lunge at his mental shielding and quickly used his Occlumency to throw him out.

"Impressive. Very impressive. You are just as powerful as I was at your age. You could join me..."

"I could do many things. I will not join you," Harry replied heatedly.

"Then you will die!" he shouted as he let loose another barrage of hexes and curses with deadly intent. Harry had to use every shield he knew, and several conjured blocks of various materials, to keep the hexes from hitting him or the girls.

"Run. Go and get help. I'll cover you," Harry hissed as the girls finally staggered to their feet. They both looked in a bad way, though Hermione looked much worse than Susan.

"Harry we should-

He conjured a block of stone to block another curse and then hit the remnants with a blasting curse. "GO. NOW!" Hermione and Susan wearily ran through the cover the destroyed stone gave as a smokescreen.

"Just you and me, Tommy," Harry growled.

A spell appeared through the debris, and Harry was too slow to block it. It hit his right arm, and he felt the bones fracture as his wand fell out of his hand and rolled away.

Harry gritted his teeth and summoned his wand back, preparing to duel with his left hand despite the pain.

"Such bravery Harry... so like your father. I killed him first you know... and then I killed your mother, though she need not have died. You'll soon be joining them," Voldemort taunted.

Harry sent a blasting curse at Voldemort, which he easily blocked. Then Harry conjured a snake.

"Bite him," he hissed. The snake was quickly decapitated.

"You dare to try and turn my own serpents against me!" Voldemort snarled, as he let loose another volley of curses with more speed and deadly accuracy than he'd shown to this point. Harry was starting to get the feeling that Voldemort was just playing with him.

"Yes, I do," said Harry as he transfigured the snake's body into a flock of birds, intent on using them to take curses for him. The birds swooped in front of the volley.

His birds were then turned to ashes by Voldemort's use of incendio. Then he sent two bludgeoners through the remnants of flame, neither of which Harry saw until it was too late.

One bludgeoner clipped his shoulder, knocking his wand away, and the other one smashed into his leg. Harry screamed as the renewed and intense wave of pain wracked his body.

"Do you see the price of defiance now, Harry? Before you die I want to make sure you learn this lesson. Crucio!" he snarled.

He felt like a thousand knives were digging into his skin. Pain, pain like he never felt before, racked his body. He felt as if each and every nerve in his body was on fire. He never even registered his screams of horror. And then it was all over; Harry breathed heavily as his body tried to recover.

He felt as if being lifted in the air. His vision swam back into focus, and Quirrell was in front of him, mere centimeters away, his wand pointed at Harry's heart.

"Good bye, Harry Potter. Avada Ke-

Harry was not going to let it end, not like this. He somehow regained the use of his left hand, and smashed it into Quirrell's head with all his strength. He felt himself dropping to the floor, and he heard Quirrel's screams, as his own leg broke from the fall. White hot tears formed in his eyes from the new burst of pain.

Quirrell was bent over, clutching his face in agony. "Master! Master it burns!"

Harry could feel another blackout coming on as his adrenaline rush began subsiding. Once again, he was down to his final strike.

He summoned his wand to his left hand, ignoring the pain and unfamiliarity of spellcasting there; casting with that hand had not paid off to the point. He intended to change that. "Telum Conicio," he intoned in his head, fighting to stay conscious. Magical Exhaustion seemed just about ready to set in.

The railroad tie erupted from his wand and shot at the blinded Quirrell like a cannon ball. It hit him right in the chest, knocking him to the ground, and forcing his wand away from him. Blood began rapidly pooling under him, as his breathing became scarce and he began moaning. A cloud of black smoke began forming from behind Quirrell's head.

"You may have won the battle, Harry Potter, but I shall win this war," The spirit cloud containing essence of Voldemort declared as it left. That was the last Harry knew as he fell into unconsciousness.

AN the 2nd: I'm sure some people will comment on the moving up of events. I'm just going to say this: Hagrid not returning Harry to Dursleys- Harry stays in Alley, actually knows about the Wizarding World- Stay in Alley reinforces sense of self-worth, self-worth makes him unwilling to deal with Snape, gets Snape sacked- Snape sacked, Quirellmort given a free hand to do as he pleases- The result. Thank you all for reading and reviewing, and if you have any comments, suggestions, constructive criticism, please send them along. However, I would like to elaborate on one point: I consider constructive criticism to identify one of my flaws, weaknesses, and other things in a similar category, and then suggesting how I could rectify it. Not sending along ten things you don't like, while offering

no suggestion for how to do it better. Those comments I'm more likely to dismiss as flames.

Chapter Nine: The Road To Recovery

Dumbledore, Moody, and Slughorn raced through the traps that were being used to guard the Sorcerer's Stone. In the chess chamber, propping herself against a rock, was Susan Bones who was being supported by Hermione Granger.

"Ms. Granger! Ms. Bones! What on Earth happened here?" Dumbledore asked urgently. Dammit, Harry could have only beaten them here by five minutes!

"Quirrell! Voldemort! Captured us!" breathed Hermione. "Susan got the worst of it!" Even in his panic, he could clearly see that Hermione was incorrect in her statement.

"Where is Harry?" Dumbledore whispered.

"He covered our escape," Hermione breathed.

"Alastor, Horace, take Ms. Bones to the hospital wing. Ms. Granger I do not mean to make such an imposition, but I may need your help," he declared as he began waving his wand. Of course he didn't, but Harry would be all right... he had to be. And Ms. Granger needed to see that he was okay. Moody and Slughorn carried Susan out of the chess chamber. "That should deaden the pain for a few minutes. Come!"

Hermione exhaustedly followed Dumbledore back towards the mirror chamber. He entered the final room, after quick application of a flame freezing charm, to see Harry and Quirrell feet away from each other; both apparently were unconscious and heavily bloodstained.

"HARRY!" screamed Hermione as she evaded Dumbledore's grip and hurriedly knelt next to him. She began tearfully trying to wake him up.

"Al... Albus," he heard Quirrell moan.

"Why, Quirinius?" Dumbledore asked sadly.

"He was... too strong," he gasped. "I'm sorry for-" he struggled to continue speaking. "I'm sorry... for every-everything" He breathed

his final breath and his eyes rolled to the back of his head. Dumbledore knew he was dead.

Dumbledore stood silently, unmoving, breathing heavily, the only sounds in the room being Hermione's anguished sobs. He had work to do. He waved his wand to stun her, and then Harry and Ms. Granger were placed on magical stretchers, to follow him back to the hospital wing. He would deal with Quirrell's body later. He didn't spare the mirror a glance as the three left the room.

"I am sorry Albus- I failed him," Slughorn croaked dejectedly. It was a few hours later, and Madam Pomphrey was still attempting to work her magic. Susan and Hermione had been easy to stabilize. But for all the ease in prescribing the cure for them, charting a path to recovery for Albus was infinitely more difficult. Every drop of blood that had dripped from Harry's body was a drop too much.

"Did I do that much more for him, Horace?" Dumbledore asked quietly. "I somehow let Lord Voldemort into the castle, and my arrogant notion that I could protect a friend's precious artifact is the main cause for what happened tonight."

Slughorn's head whipped 'round at the mention of his former student. "Voldemort was... here!" Slughorn gasped. "I thought he was finally dead."

"You saw the note as well as we did, Horace. It appears young Harry only bought us time to catch a breather. Tonight, for significant blood price, he purchased a bit more," Dumbledore explained tiredly.

The professor began shaking. He was quiet for a few moments. He didn't believe... he hadn't wanted to believe... "Albus, here. This is something I should have done a long time ago, but in my foolishness, and my cowardice, I steadfastly refused to do so. Here is the memory you asked for all those years ago," he put his wand to his head and pulled out a silvery thread of memory. He conjured a vial and placed the memory. "Please don't hate me. Most of all, please... don't let Harry hate me. You can accept my resignation whenever you like."

Dumbledore stared at the vial Slughorn handed him as if appraising it. "Horace, your resignation will not be necessary. You have served this castle well, for many years. Human fear, something we can all

relate to, should not make anyone disregard years of exemplary service. I can not, in good conscience accept your resignation." Horace moved to protest. "Do you know what young Harry's favorite class is? He likes Charms and Transfiguration, of course, but most of all, he loves Potions. Around this castle, I see that once again, a love of potions resides in these hallowed halls. In half a year, you have undone the damage I had allowed by allowing Severus carte blanche. As for hatred... while I will admit displeasure at the withholding of this information, I doubt Harry will hold it against you. Lily certainly wouldn't have."

Slughorn was silent. "I will do better. For him. There is so much I could teach him... he is such a wonderful student. And so very brave... Infinitely braver than I was at his age, or even now, when I'm past my prime. I will not fail him again," Slughorn declared heatedly. He was silent again after saying his piece.

"Albus, the Defense Post is unoccupied. Do you want me to take it for the remainder of the year?" Moody asked after a few minutes of awkward silence.

"If you would please, Alastor. Besides, I know a young Ravenclaw you are determined to mentor," Dumbledore replied.

Moody smiled. "Indeed. I was thinking... he doesn't have a real duelist's aptitude, but wouldn't it be beneficial to bring Remus Lupin onboard?"

Dumbledore was silent for a moment. "Yes, I can see how that would be beneficial. And seeing as Severus is no longer employed here... I could in fact give him employment as a tutor! Yes, that would allow him to work with the student body, and still have time to properly teach Harry."

He took a breath. "As for me... Harry has proven his dedication time and again. I feel we must indeed step up his training. I fear I may have to demonstrate a few curses that were popular during Gellert's time. Not truly dark magic... but questionable certainly. Yet the questionable content of the spells seems rather negated by knowing that their knowledge and use may save Harry's life one day."

"Perhaps Filius should have a place in our plans as well," Slughorn pointed out. "He was a champion dueler, and I think his experience could prove invaluable to Harry."

"I only wish to bring the other Hogwarts teachers into this endeavor when Harry has true need of their services. I believe there is enough for the four of us to teach him that he will not need to seek more education for quite some time. However, you do bring up a valid point: Filius must be alerted as to the status of his Ravens. Tilly!"

With a crack, a short spindly house elf appeared. "What can I's be doing for Head sir?"

"Tilly, please alert Filius Flitwick that two of his Ravenclaws, Hermione Granger and Harry Potter, are in the hospital wing," Dumbledore ordered kindly. Tilly disappeared with a crack.

"I'll alert Pomona in the morning. Indeed, I am expecting Amelia Bones in a half hour, so I must depart," Dumbledore said, getting to his feet.

"Yes, I really should be getting to bed as well, Headmaster," said Horace as he got to his feet.

"Aye. If I'm going to be staying in this castle for the next few months, my room will need something stronger than that temporary ward set I threw up," Moody growled.

"Then I fear we must part ways temporarily. Until later, Horace, Alastor," said Dumbledore as he walked away.

"Wakey, wakey, Harry," came a familiar voice.

Harry lifted himself up to see who was calling for him, and for the second time in his life, he came face to face with his own reflection.

"Hello, Harold," Harry greeted neutrally as he got to his feet.

"I thought, especially considering recent events, that we ought to have another chat," Harold said slowly.

"Recent events? Do you mean the hippogriff that ran over me, or Quirrell mort kicking my ass without even trying?" Harry asked.

"From the stupidity you exercised last evening, it very well could be both. Really Harry, why didn't you just hand the note to Moody, or run with Neville to Dumbledore? No, you just had to rush off and knock on death's door. Again," Harold declared with obvious distaste.

"Please forgive me for taking the note to literally mean that if I didn't present myself my friends would have died!" Harry snarled.

"Why do you keep getting yourself involved in this shit?" Harold asked mournfully.

"Because I'm the only one who can. I would not have been able to live with myself and by extension you, if my friends died, and my inaction, or wrongful action, directly led to their deaths," Harry replied. "I take it suicide is contrary to your self-concerning instincts?"

"Indeed." He shook himself. "Harry, I'm not a bad guy. I'm part of you; I know how the milk of human kindness flows through your/my body. Still, I feel that you aren't... being cautious enough, planning, or in other words, trying to actually stay alive. For example, I understand you felt an obligation to save your friends. Why didn't you just keep Quirrell talking until the cavalry arrived, or better yet, let Moody in on the situation, and have him as back-up while Neville rounded up the rest of the cavalry. The self-sufficiency you exhibit will get us killed!"

"Perhaps I should have done that," Harry said slowly, "But Hindsight is a damn sight better than my vision."

"Indeed," Harold replied. "And as a result you wrote a check your body is still trying to cash. Harry, we got off on the wrong foot. Let me state my piece. Your training has been going well, especially with the help Flamel gave you back at the Department of Mysteries in exchange for getting his stone returned. That said, you need to go to the next level. Nothing, nothing you had could even touch Voldemort until you punched him and let the magic do its work. Even with all of the work you put in, your magical strength equaling an auror, and getting stronger by the day, you still only won through a fluke. You need to cast spells faster, stronger, more accurately, you need a much bigger spell repertoire, you need to learn to actually move during a duel, and more importantly: you need allies. Moody,

Slughorn, and Dumbledore were good starts, but your friends were... so woefully outclassed."

"I want to train them up a bit, but I know I'm not ready!" Harry countered. "I figured my best bet was working hard to learn from the powerful wizards around me, and then once I mastered that, I could train my friends!"

"It still is," Harold replied. "But how do you think Susan, Neville, or Hermione will react to last night's events? I suspect that when you finally awaken, and Merlin knows when that will be- you took some heavy hits! Anyway, when you finally awaken, Hermione and Susan will probably be begging you to teach them. If I were in their place, I'd never want to feel helpless again. Neville of course will go along with whatever you do. He looks up to you so. The way most people regard Dumbledore is the way he regards you; you are the powerful sorcerer, the omnipotent warrior, his best friend and closest confidant, who can do no wrong."

"You think so?" Harry asked uncertainly. When did Harold get so good at reading people... or willing to help!

"I was always willing to help, Harry... we just differed on what that word meant. Now our goals are compatible. As for knowing your friends, I am your unconscious mind. As you live and breathe, you also know these things, but do not acknowledge them. Returning to our 'plans for the future' segment, the most crucial thing that needs to be dealt with is that you need to start building bridges," Harold told him.

"Building bridges?" Harry asked.

"Since you arrived here in September, you have secured the loyalty of Hermione, Neville, Anthony, Susan, and by extension Hannah, as well as Dumbledore, Slughorn, and Moody. However, you have also alienated Padma and Lisa Turpin, both of whom possess exemplary grades and a willingness to work hard. Daphne Greengrass and Tracy Davis are still unhappy over the marriage contract debacle," Harold help up a hand. "You weren't wrong, Harry, just tactless. In this case, that's about the same as being wrong. You have yet to reach out to the Weasleys. And yes, I know you only went along with that to keep up your ruse as "Dumbledore's man." But still, the twins have potential to be valuable allies despite the fact that they

sometimes use their pranking abilities to bully people. The other Ravenclaw boys are unknown quantities, especially Boot, who looks like he might be a valuable ally at some future point. And, don't argue yet, I saw potential in Draco Malfoy."

"Malfoy?" Harry asked with the disbelief evident in his tone. Maybe Harold here had gone 'round the bend.

"The blond peacock could be useful. And at some point you will need a spy in with the Death Eaters. Of course, dealing with Malfoy is like making a deal with the Devil. And you will have to keep an eye on him, as you will with anyone I've mentioned. There is wisdom to the old saying "Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer." However, any attempts to reach out would alienate your core. Adopt a 'wait and see' policy; perhaps, at the end of the day, there is something salvageable with him," Harold suggested. "I also suggest you keep an eye on dear Nymphadora and Cedric; both could potentially be useful wands in the future. And there are probably many people I am missing. The point, Harry, is that I have reconsidered your self-interests, and getting stronger is definitely in your self interests. After the events of last night, I truly doubt your 'trainers' will cut you any slack. But without friends and allies, the coming skirmish could be very short and bloody. After all, we both know that someday, perhaps sooner than expected, we will be crossing wands with dear old Dumbles."

"Any other pieces of advice?" Harry asked, truly interested in what his... counterpart had to say.

"On the subject of getting stronger, those rituals Ollivander mentioned- you'll probably need to arrange to get them done this summer. I believe that you are going to have some breathing room before the next crisis, but by the end of third year, Voldemort may well be ascending once more," Harold postulated.

"So get stronger, learn more spells, gather allies, and perform the rituals Ollivander suggests; is that about the size of it?" Harry asked.

"Yes that sounds about right. I hope the next time we have another chat like this, the subject matter will be whether to take our harem to the villa on Sicily, or to buy an island in the Caribbean," Harold said wistfully.

"Me too, Harold. Me too," Harry said as his counterpart dissolved in mist, and he fell back into darkness.

Pale blue eyes stared into light brown ones.

"Tell me what you see, mudblood!" Quirrell ordered.

Hermione stared into the mirror desperately, hoping she could retrieve the stone he wanted, whatever it was, and the pain would stop. Again she saw Harry next to her, an arm draped around her shoulder, and a peaceful smile on both their faces. Again she heard Quirrell snarl "Crucio!" and her body began convulsing and writhing in agony.

"I DON'T SEE A STONE!" Hermione screamed. The pain ceased. "I just see me and Harry," she muttered after a few seconds of recovery.

"USELESS!" shrieked Quirrell. He banished her into the wall, pain once again flooded her body, and she was bound once again. "Let's see what dear Ms. Bones has to say," he snarled.

He released the Imperious curse's hold over her. The dreamy look that had become a part of her face whenever Quirrell wasn't issuing orders immediately ceased. She gasped in horror as a flood of memories came back to her.

"Excellent, you remember," Quirrell stated. "Look into this mirror, and retrieve the stone for me." Susan looked and looked, but every few seconds, after not seeing a stone, she too would feel the agony of the Cruciatus curse.

"All I see is me with my parents!" she muttered tearfully. She too was painfully banished to the wall and bound.

"Perhaps Potter will have better luck," he mused quietly. "But for now... Crucio!" he shouted, pointing again at Susan. After a few seconds, he stopped the curse. He turned his wand on Hermione. "Your turn, mudblood. Crucio!"

When the curse finally stopped, a tear ran down her cheek. "Harry, help us. Please," she thought desperately...

Hermione awoke to a blood curdling scream she soon realized was her own. She looked around wildly... the hospital wing. Across from her, Susan and Neville lay in beds, watching her worriedly.

"Hermione! Are you all right!" Susan asked weakly.

"Nightmare," she muttered. Finally, she saw out of the corner of her eye, that the bed right next to her was occupied as well. She turned her head to see Harry, head heavily bandaged, asleep as well.

"Is he...?" she couldn't get the words out.

"Pomphrey had to remove all the bones in his right arm, something else to heal his legs, and something for his shoulder, as well as a dose of the Cruciatus Curse counter, and something for head trauma," Neville rattled off. "Quirrell is dead," he finished blandly.

"Why are you here, Neville?" Hermione asked seeing him in hospital wing garb.

"I was here when Harry was brought in and I had a panic attack," he admitted abashedly. "I suspect Dumbledore's having a chat with my gran as we speak, so at least we're all in the same immediate area. You look bloody exhausted Get some sleep, Hermione," he turned, "Susan, get back to sleep, despite how difficult a prospect that might seem to be. I know Harry will be up and raring to go by morning."

Hermione gladly took Neville's advice and turned to try and get back to the land of nod. Yet every time she finally fell asleep dreams of the night's horrific events bombarded her until she eventually awoke, either screaming, or in tears.

"Fawkes, please take this to Remus Lupin," Dumbledore requested. The phoenix flew over, and clenched his note in his beak. He disappeared in a flash of light. And with him went the peaceful trill he'd been carrying on; his departure now left Dumbledore feeling cold and empty. Dumbledore sat back in his chair, waiting. His patience paid dividends once he was alerted to people right outside his office door. "Come in Augusta, Amelia!"

His door was slammed open as two angry witches, one a tall, thin witch with a bony complexion and a vulture hat, and the other a square-jawed witch with grey hair and a monocle at her right eye,

stormed in. Dumbledore wasn't looking forward to this. They took the unoccupied seats across from him and began glaring heatedly.

"Before you take me to task over each and every one of my failings, please let me give you the overview of events. I will not mince words or waste your time; just give me one chance." Still glaring, Amelia and Augusta grudgingly nodded slightly.

"Last evening was Horace's Christmas party. I believe you both are familiar with the conduct of his parties from your Hogwarts's days." Two more nods. "During the course of the evening, Harry Potter, and Neville, who had come with Hermione Granger and Susan respectively, separated from the girls for some time. After wandering around and meeting some of the other guests, Harry and Neville attempted to rejoin their dates. However, Harry, while looking for them, stumbled upon this note." He withdrew the note Neville had handed to him last evening, and handed it to Augusta.

She took it and quickly skimmed it. Her anger transformed into fear; raw, unadulterated fear. She began shaking slightly as she handed the note to Amelia Bones. Amelia took it, and read it thoroughly. When she finally looked up, fear had reared its ugly head in her posture as well.

"Once Harry had discovered this note, he dispatched Neville to alert Alastor Moody, Horace Slughorn, and myself. I can only guess about his motives, but I suspect he took the note quite literally to mean that if he did not come alone, his friends would perish." Seeing as that was the meaning Lord Voldemort had wanted to convey with that message, this did nothing to calm down the witches in front of him. Indeed, Albus reflected that if he hadn't been forced to deal with crises like this constantly, he himself would be a nervous wreck as well. It was only unfortunate experience with similar sets of circumstances that enabled him to deal with episodes like this so calmly.

"From what I recovered of your niece's memories, Voldemort, in disguise as Quirrell, the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor, had placed the Imperious curse on her, and then used the separation to subdue Ms. Granger. I briefly scanned her memories regarding last evening to witness her exposure to the Cruciatus curse, and Voldemort's attempts to use them to regain power," Dumbledore declared tiredly. "She is currently in the Hospital Wing,

recovering, as is Ms. Granger. Your grandson is recovering as well, though from a panic attack he suffered upon seeing Harry's state."

"The rest I do not have the strength to speak of. Instead, I recovered Quirrell's memory of the events before he expired." He summoned his pensieve. "I have already placed the memory into my pensieve. Come; let us take this unfortunate walk down memory lane."

All three touched the memory at the same time. Augusta Longbottom and Amelia Bones watched transfixed as Harry came to the rescue, and bartered the stone for the girls's lives. Dumbledore estimated that it would have been nigh impossible to break the concentration they displayed as they watched Harry begin to duel Voldemort. He could see the relief on their faces as Harry threw up a diversion that allowed the girls to get to safety, only to have it turn to horror as a bone-breaker collided with his arm. Still he fought, dueling rather ineffectively, which isn't to say that his technique had been that much more effective previously, with his left hand. They watched, once again transfixed, as he took another two hits from a pair of bludgeoners, and Voldemort seemed ready to finish him off for the second time in his life. And once again, he snatched victory from the jaws of defeat. The memory ended right after Harry summoned his wand and sent the finishing blow at Quirrell. Albus had to eject Augusta and Amelia from the memory; they remained motionless despite its completion.

They were all silent for a time. "What stone was he looking for?" Amelia asked, only a ghost of her typical businesslike tone remaining.

"My old colleague Nicolas Flamel is very famous for creating the Sorcerer's Stone." Recognition flashed across her face. "Hints of Voldemort making a move for the stone as a way to return to his old form surfaced. Consequently, I needed a way to neutralize Voldemort's resources, and prevent the stone from falling into his hands. I was certain, so very arrogantly certain, he would be stopped by Hogwarts's wards, his resources would dwindle, and that once again, he would be blocked from returning. I take full responsibility for my actions."

"How is Harry?" Augusta whispered.

"Alive. He suffered injuries it would take fully trained, powerful wizards months to recover from. So of course, he should be up and about this afternoon. As for Susan, she is to be released this evening; you can take her home for the Christmas holidays tonight. I believe circumstances are the same with Neville," Dumbledore declared.

"How about Ms. Granger?" Amelia asked.

"I believe she will also be released this evening. If she so chooses, I will apparate her home tonight. I owe the Grangers an explanation; nothing less than the truth would suffice," he responded.

"What about Harry?" Augusta pressed.

"He has chosen to remain at the castle for Christmas. Alastor Moody has agreed to take over the DADA post for the rest of the school year until I can find a replacement. I imagine his Christmas will pass in a blur of training," Dumbledore responded sadly.

"He could come home with us," blurted out Amelia and Augusta simultaneously.

They stared at each other. "He saved Susan's life. The Bones family has first rights of invitation," Amelia declared.

"Neville is his god-brother. By the bonds of family elationships, House Longbottom has first rights of invitation," responded Augusta angrily.

"I appreciate the gesture, and I'm sure Harry would as well, but he has already chosen to remain here for Christmas. You can of course make the offers to him, but don't be surprised if he refuses. I imagine he is already planning to spend his Christmas holiday dueling with Moody," Dumbledore replied, something resembling a twinkle finally reemerging in his eyes.

"Can I see Susan?" asked Amelia, once she came to her senses.

"I would like to give them satisfactory time to recuperate after such a traumatic experience. At midday, return and you can see your niece. The same is true for Neville," Dumbledore responded firmly. "I know

the difficulty in doing so, but I suggest you both go home and get some much needed rest." A little burst of legilimency offset any potential arguments.

"Right, we'll be back in a few hours," said Amelia Bones as she grabbed Augusta and dragged her out of the office.

"SUSAN!" Amelia lost her restraint and ran over to hug her niece as soon as she entered the hospital wing. Susan hugged her back just as tightly. "How are you feeling?" she whispered.

"Better. Last night still seems like a bad dream, though..." Susan whispered back as she shook, slightly.

"Your parents would be proud, Neville," Augusta whispered as she sat down next to Neville while cradling him in a hug. "Supporting a friend the way you did is something they were well known for."

"I've spoken with Madam Pomphrey. You are free to leave with your guardians at any time," Dumbledore reminded them. He turned to nod at Alastor Moody, who had accompanied them; it was a signal to stand guard over Harry's unconscious body. He turned to Hermione. "If you so choose, I could take you home immediately."

All three looked hesitant. "When will Harry awaken?" asked Susan.

"Potter should be out of commission until Christmas at least," Moody replied. He felt a sharp poke at his chest, and looked down to see a wand pointed directly at his heart; a wand that was owned by Harry Potter.

"Constant Vigilance, Alastor!" Harry whispered as he lowered the wand.

"HARRY!" Hermione leapt across the distance separating the beds and tackled him, hugging him tighter than she ever had before.

"That makes it twice this weekend you've caught me off guard. Let's see, ten laps, to the power of two..." Moody growled. "After all, I'm going to have to drill the concept of dodging during a duel into your thick skull."

Harry visibly shuddered. "On second thought, I think I ought to head elsewhere for the Christmas holidays." Hermione was still clinging to him, breathing heavily into his hospital gown; he made no move to wiggle out of her grasp. "I hear Tierra Del Fuego is nice this time of year."

"Wherever you run, I'll follow, and then call it a lesson in stealth operations and evading detection," Moody replied.

"It will be hard to do that without a wand, Alastor old boy," said Harry as he twirled Moody's wand between his fingers. Why didn't Moody pay attention to his wand being removed from its holster? Dumbledore's eyes twinkled merrily, as Susan, Amelia, Neville, and Augusta all stared; he had removed Moody's wand, without losing body parts!

Moody actually growled. "I can get a replacement wand, or my spare, or even just catch a portkey. There's nowhere on Earth you can run, Potter!"

"Harry, please return Professor Moody's wand," Dumbledore commanded.

Harry hurriedly handed it back to him, who pocketed it with another growl.

"You know Harry, if you are looking for a vacation, you could always come home with Susan for the holidays," Amelia offered.

"Or spend it with us at Longbottom Manor," Augusta pointed out, glaring at Amelia Bones.

"Thank you both, but I have plans for these holidays. Getting my ass kicked by professor Moody is unfortunately a part of those plans," Harry declined politely.

Hermione finally untangled herself from Harry. "I'm so glad you're all right," she whispered.

"I must admit, Harry, I am rather surprised to see you up and about this quickly," Dumbledore commented.

"It's magic, Headmaster," Harry replied sweetly.

"I don't mean to interrupt, Albus, but I feel we should take our leave," said Augusta as a weathered hand rested on Neville's shoulder.

"I concur. I will be in touch over the holidays," Amelia growled threateningly.

Dumbledore turned to Hermione. "Are you ready to return home as well, Ms. Granger?"

She looked hesitant, probably about leaving Harry alone in the castle.

"Hermione, your family misses you. You should go home. I'll still be here when you get back," Harry whispered as he rubbed her back.

She hugged him again. "Thank you for saving me," she whispered. She let go. "All right, Headmaster. I'm ready to leave as well."

"See you after Christmas, Harry!" chorused Neville and Susan as they left the Wing with their relatives in tow.

"I'll see you soon, Harry," Hermione whispered.

"Goodbye, Hermione," Harry said as she walked away with the Headmaster.

AN: Once Again, thanks to David305 for catching my mistakes. I apologize for the brevity of this chapter; however, the next one should be at least double this in length. Thank you to all who have read, and to all a good night.

Chapter Ten: The Most Wonderful Time of The Year

"All right, Potter; here's a new trick for you to try on for size," Moody growled. Sure enough, it was one day into Holidays, and Moody was already running him ragged. Moody had collected on his laps; thankfully Harry had been allowed to stop at 25.

"Throw a stunner at me," Moody commanded. Harry withdrew his wand, and complied. Moody twirled around and his wand connected with his stunner, sending it back from whence it came.

"Interesting," Harry commented idly once Moody had awoken him. There was no way he could have blocked that, seeing as he didn't know what was coming.

"That trick can be done to defend against typical dueling spells, Potter. What you do is channel raw magic into your wand, and if it is stronger than the magic of the oncoming spell, it can 'parry' it; hence the term, parrying," Moody explained.

He spent the entire rest of the day working on parrying with Moody, discovering which curses could be deflected, like stunners or blasting curses, and which ones to shield or duck out of the way of, like bone-breakers. Harry was getting fairly good at parrying; he was finally able to parry straight back at Moody towards the end of the day.

Finally, Moody called a halt. Then, he switched to Harry trying to get past Moody's parrying. With the result that Harry failed to slip even one measly nose-itch jinx past Moody by the time he'd called the training session to a halt, some four hours later. He cast warming charms on himself and Harry, to counteract the effects of the snow, as Harry had been shivering for the past hour or so.

"You did well, Potter," Moody growled, as he handed Harry a piece of chocolate. "But you're definitely going to need to work on your casting technique. You add too much flourish to your spells. Even non-verbally, anyone dueling you would know what was coming from a mile away."

"Thanks for the advice, professor," Harry replied as he took the chocolate.

"I wanted to ask you something Potter," Moody said seriously as he withdrew his hip flask and took a sip.

"What?" Harry asked curiously.

"How did you feel, facing him?" Moody whispered.

The question froze Harry's insides. "Terrified," Harry admitted. "The idea that he could kill me really didn't hit home though. I was terrified for what Hermione and Susan were going through. But still, at least I'm alive."

Moody stared at him. "You're a funny kid, Potter," he muttered. He seemed to stare off into space slightly, with a slight frown on his face. Finally, he snapped out of it and spoke up. "All right, let's get back to the castle before this damn cold takes my other leg."

Harry walked in to the Great Hall a few days later, intent on eating breakfast before another training session with Moody. He winced, still feeling the cuts and bruises from yesterday's session. As he sat down, he had to resist crying out in pain, as he'd kicked his injured leg, the one that he'd broken three times since he started training daily with the mad ex-auror, into the table leg. He growled mentally, remembering yesterday's lesson.

"WHAT THE BLOODY HELL WERE YOU TRYING TO DO, BOY!" roared Moody after Harry had made a half-hearted attempt to dive out of the way of an oncoming stunner, resulting in another humiliating awakening courtesy of Moody.

"Dive out of the way?" Harry half told, half asked. Did he really look that bloody awful trying to dodge?

"Dive out of the way? DIVE OUT OF THE WAY? Merlin, Potter, I'm betting any dark wizard you ever come across is gonna wish for you to dive out of the way exactly like that!" He took a breath, still looking like he was about to start cursing Harry just for the hell of it. Moody turned away, and then swung back towards him and began hurling a barrage of curses at him. Harry began trying to use the dodging skills Dumbledore had drilled into his head to wait out the tempest caused by Moody's temper. It worked well for about five minutes, and then Harry slipped and fell into the path of a stunner.

Moody awoke him again with an ugly snarl on his face. "Maybe, Potter, when you learn to take a duel seriously, and you stop waving that wand around like a baboon with a stick, you might last a few minutes against a dark wizard like Quirrell without looking like a fool," Moody spat before he stormed off.

Harry sighed again, knowing Moody definitely wasn't going to pull any punches today. He knew deep down that he deserved Moody's scorn; here was a guy giving up his free time to help him not look like a joke against a dark wizard, and he hadn't been giving his all. He was distracted from his self-flagellation session by the daily arrival of the owls.

Out of the swarm of owls delivering letters to the few left at Hogwarts over the holidays, Harry looked up to see Hedwig, and another night-black owl flying towards him. Hedwig landed first, and Harry took the letter to read, once he saw it was from his advisor, while the other owl waited patiently.

Hello Harry,

I find myself in the uncomfortable position of penning this letter, but it must be done. First, let me make it perfectly clear: as the Potter family advisor, I am supposed to advise you. The idea is that when you listen to someone who perhaps is wiser and more experienced than you are, you can, perhaps, learn something, maybe. So, hearing from our mutual friend that you decided to run off to face the Dark Lord, rather than wait for help, even if you knew, with absolute certainty, that your friends were actually being held captive, could give a person the idea that either the advisor is not doing his job, or the advisee is a complete and utter dolt. The existence of one of these conditions has already proven by the fact that I heard this from our mutual friend, and not from your person. Obviously, I possess a certain degree of pride that refuses to allow me to believe that I have failed so utterly as your advisor, so I must consider the second option.

Let us recount your performance on the night in question. Upon being alerted to mysterious happenstances occurring, you came into possession of a letter from Lord Voldemort, detailing his kidnapping and ransoming of your friends. Not once did you apparently ever consider that the Dark Lord could lie. Dark Lords do possess that ability- perhaps you didn't know that. And, in the future, when you

face off against Lord Voldemort, he may use the same methodology, without actually capturing a friend, and lure you into a trap. Leaving that aside, because in this instance, the Dark Lord actually did as he wrote, you then proceeded to send your friend to gather reinforcements while you ran off to face him. You, an eleven year old wizard, with no training in how to duel, but rather how to cast various spells- most of which the average wizard or witch knows but does not use in everyday life, ran off to face the Dark Lord. In dueling said Dark Lord, you revealed your abilities, which are certainly impressive for an eleven year old, but not for facing a Dark Lord. So now Voldemort possesses a partial knowledge of your abilities in combat. Congratulations. And in your last letter, I could not help but detect a tone of shock that you were unable to match the level of proficiency a Dark Lord fifty years your senior displayed. Out of idle curiosity, I must ask what color the sky is on your world.

Harry, when I took you on as an advisee, I could never have foreseen the depths of your stupidity. I don't know where this arrogance and recklessness came from, but it needs to disappear in a hurry. Let me make this perfectly clear: you do not have all the answers, you do not have the weight of the world resting on your shoulders, and you are most definitely not nearly skilled enough to tangle with the likes of the Dark Lord.

Though you have received attention and tutoring from Albus Dumbledore, Alastor Moody, Horace Slughorn, as well as myself and Nicolas, you are not ready for any sort of combat outside of a schoolyard brawl. What is the most powerful spell you know? The bolt thrower. While it has served you well, it is a spell easily countered- especially if an opponent knows it's coming. For all its crudeness, a single unforgivable would most likely put you out of action, and even the lowliest Death Eater is capable of casting it. A little bad luck has killed droves of people more skilled than you are right now.

Again Harry, I can not express the depths of my disappointment. You have consistently played a fool's game in matters you should know better than to engage in. I can only hope that this letter illuminates the many mistakes you have made and hardens your resolve to change for the better. Otherwise, you shall soon be without an advisor, and you shall lose access to your fortune for the next few years as stated by the Advisor contract signed back in August.

Wishing you good luck in finding common sense,

Emanuel Ollivander- Current Potter Family Advisor

Harry groaned and stuffed the letter back into the envelope. Maybe Moody and Ollivander had a point. Maybe he wasn't thinking straight; maybe his vision was starting to be blurred by the prospects of power. Ollivander was right on several counts. Moody was right on several counts. "You are an exceptional wizard, Harry," Dumbledore had told him just last night. Was the Headmaster trying to inflate Harry's ego for some nefarious purpose? Or maybe, when Riddle had... merged with him, he had acquired a portion of Lord Voldemort's arrogance. Now there was a scary thought.

Moody and Ollivander were right, Harry thought. He was becoming too arrogant, too in love with power, and it was blinding him. Right after he finished his post, he had to go to Moody and apologize for wasting his time, because in his state yesterday, that was clearly what he was doing. As he settled on a plan of action, he reached out and took the other letter from the black owl, and it flew away. Harry noted the Gringotts crest on the envelope as he unsealed it and read it. He dropped the envelope after he read the first two lines:

Dear Mr. Potter

Subject to our inquiries relating to Mr. Sirius Black, there is much evidence, conclusive and inconclusive, to refute the charges of murder and betrayal laid upon his person.

"You did well, Harry," Dumbledore complimented him after the night's lesson. He had worked Harry extremely hard in the use of metallic and marble shielding, yet Harry had endured his trial by fire. "I wanted to show you, for future reference, the curse Voldemort hit you with that forced you to duel with your left hand. Here," he conjured a dummy. "Ossus Fragmen," Dumbledore incanted as he waved his wand at the dummy's arm. It fractured into hundreds of pieces. "It is a rather dark curse, but this knowledge may prove life-saving at a later date," he explained.

"Sir, I was wondering if we could have a chat," Harry requested. He had resolved to ignore any compliments Dumbledore gave, as an

inflated ego was not healthy. Neither was his time at the Dursleys good for his ego, but there had to be a happy medium.

"Yes, Harry," he took his seat behind his desk, while Harry sat opposite him. "What's on your mind?"

"Sirius Black," Harry blurted out. The goblin's investigation had turned up a significant amount of convincing and compelling evidence which Dumbledore couldn't ignore.

Dumbledore visibly flinched. "I would rather you hadn't discovered that particular dark piece of history," he said warily.

"Well, I first wanted to ask why you didn't work to get him a trial, or at very least, a questioning under Veritaserum?" Harry continued.

"I don't quite understand what you mean," Dumbledore replied.

"Well, considering that in less than 100 hours four members of the Order of the Phoenix had been compromised, as history shows, then why didn't you question the suspected traitor on who else might have been compromised?" Harry asked.

Dumbledore sighed warily. "I assumed that Sirius had betrayed us completely, after the loss of four important members, and I reorganized everything from that premise, changing addresses and ways to communicate."

Harry reluctantly accepted that. For the moment; internally, he jotted that down on the list of Why I can't trust Dumbledore. "How did Peter Pettigrew die?"

Dumbledore stared at him. "The reductor curse. As you may be aware, the largest piece of him found was his finger."

"That makes no sense!" Harry declared. "Where exactly could that spell be aimed so that the only remnant of a body was a finger?" Dumbledore continued staring. "Conjure a dummy, please," Harry requested. The headmaster did just that. "Black was supposedly this close to Pettigrew, right?" Harry said, as he stood a little more than a foot away from the dummy. He pointed his wand towards the left side. "Reducto." The curse blew the dummy apart until only parts of

the right side remained. "Considering that had to be the angle Black cast the curse, there seems to be something fishy."

"He was a very talented and powerful wizard, Harry," Dumbledore reminded him gently.

"Was he more powerful then than I am now?" Harry countered. And then he flinched internally, as he realized exactly what he'd said, and how much trouble it had gotten him into in the last twenty four hours.

Dumbledore looked troubled. "What is your point in picking at these old wounds?"

"Considering Peter Pettigrew was a rat animagus, I believe it is possible he is still alive and used his animal form to escape," Harry declared.

"How do you know that?" Dumbledore asked slowly.

"My father prominently reminisced about becoming animagi with his friends, Peter Pettigrew and Sirius Black, to help one Remus Lupin deal with his monthly transformation into a werewolf," Harry replied. "My father became a stag, Black a grim, and Pettigrew a rat." He handed Dumbledore his father's journal. "Read it at your leisure; see for yourself. But from his descriptions of Pettigrew and Black, the former seemed more likely to be a traitor than Black, my godfather. When you cast the fidelius charm, did you see who the secret keeper was?"

"No. Lily and James told me it was to be Sirius," Dumbledore replied.

"But you didn't see him? The charm was left open for my parents to designate someone else?" Harry pressed.

"Yes, it is theoretically possible someone else could have been made Secret Keeper," Dumbledore grudgingly agreed.

"Well, consider the logical train of thought. Just like the "magic bullet theory" has several flaws, there seems no way the reductor curse could have killed Pettigrew in that manner. More pieces of him, larger pieces, would have to remain. Thus, it holds that the curse didn't kill him, and Black did not have enough time to fire something

else, or no cause to fire two curses if he had already killed Pettigrew. Why would he blast Peter to smithereens so that barely a finger could be found? Finally, if the reductor curse didn't kill Pettigrew, but did kill the other twelve people, why was his finger left there? Why wouldn't Peter have transformed into a rat and hidden away to reveal himself when the aurors arrived? Plus, the finger shows he wanted to fake his death. For what purpose did he need people to believe he was dead? Lastly, considering that you have just admitted the theoretical possibility that another became the Secret Keeper, then Sirius's motives in the logical scenario can be questioned. That's why I felt the need to pick at 'old wounds'," Harry finished.

Dumbledore sat back, looking troubled. "Indeed. Would it inconvenience you if I were to borrow that journal?" Harry handed it over. "I shall look into this matter. If that is all..."

"Yes, Headmaster. Have a nice night," said Harry as he walked out of the headmaster's office.

"Hello Harry," Dumbledore said as Harry walked in for a lesson a few nights later. A pale-faced man with light brown hair flecked with gray and wearing worn and patched clothing stood next to Dumbledore's desk. Dumbledore gestured to him. "Let me introduce Mr. Remus Lupin."

"Otherwise known as Moony," Harry inserted helpfully. Lupin stared between Harry and Dumbledore.

"He read his father's journal," Dumbledore said in answer to his unasked question.

If possible, Remus went even paler. "You know I'm a wer-"

"A werewolf? Certainly." Harry replied neutrally.

"What- does that- are you-?" Lupin stuttered.

"Am I uncomfortable with your being a werewolf? I am more comfortable with that than your absence from my life, especially considering how reliable my father said you were," Harry answered.

"Harry!" Dumbledore spoke sharply.

"Pardon me, but I assumed that people liked to be answered truthfully," Harry replied. "The truth hurts." He turned to Dumbledore. "Let me guess, in light of recent events, you reached out to the cleverest of the Marauders to work on training with me."

"Indeed," Dumbledore replied, some of his magical power seeping into his voice.

"Well then, what do you bring to the table, Mr. Lupin?" Harry asked politely. Considering how the man in front of him hadn't checked up on him at all, and yet he came at the drop of Dumbledore's hat, Harry was not about to cut him any slack.

"Er, I was a pretty fair duelist, and I was pretty good with warding and arithmancy," Lupin stammered.

"Indeed. Was? Mr. Lupin, I assumed that even if you couldn't at least look in on your best friends' son, you'd at least still be in fighting form," said Harry rather disappointedly.

"Harry, please stop talking," Dumbledore commanded.

Harry ignored him. "I mean, I don't understand at all why you," he stared pointedly at Dumbledore, "couldn't at least have gotten him a monthly dose of Wolfsbane. Is professor Slughorn at least going to provide him with one?"

"Yes, Harry," Dumbledore answered tiredly. "I understand you may have frustrations with Remus, but I trust you can at least not devolve into a Severus like persona and manage a semblance of a professional relationship."

"Of course, Headmaster," Harry replied neutrally.

"Well then, I thought we might have a little review tonight, show Remus how far you've come," Dumbledore said, his cheerfulness returning almost automatically.

"That didn't particularly go well," Remus commented sadly after the night's session had finally ended. Harry had politely yet firmly declined any and all suggestions Remus made.

Dumbledore sighed heavily. "I apologize, Remus. I did not know about the extent of Harry's problems with you." He waved his wand, and a bottle of firewhiskey and two glasses appeared. "Harry is generally much politer than he was tonight."

Remus graciously accepted the glass Dumbledore poured for him. "Thank you for your offer of employment, Headmaster," Remus said as they toasted his new job. He took a swig. "I'm curious: what happened to Severus?"

Dumbledore stared at him. "Severus did not last a full week before he and Harry came to blows," Dumbledore replied.

Remus choked on his firewhiskey. "Really?"

"Their first potions class ended in a duel that Harry won due to the element of surprise. Horace Slughorn came out of retirement at Harry's behest almost immediately after I fired Severus," Dumbledore answered.

Remus stared at him. "What can I do to improve our relationship?" Remus asked slowly, sensing the dangerous water he was treading in by being on Harry's bad side.

"I would advise sitting down and talking with Harry, and taking his inquisition with a smile," Dumbledore responded.

Remus was silent for a moment. "The things he was capable of..." he finally commented. "He is extraordinarily powerful. James couldn't have managed half of what he did even in top form."

"He started out this year working on his own. He learned most of the magic working alone or with Horace. He finished off Severus with a blasting curse, after less than a full week of school. He has killed a mountain troll. He dueled against Voldemort more skillfully than most aurors and hit-wizards. He is capable of conjuring shields of metal to block curses. He can manage, albeit inconsistently, casting the *Imprimis Patrocinor* shield. Yes, I believe I have a measure of Harry's abilities," Dumbledore said.

Remus stared in awe. "Merlin!" he breathed.

"Indeed Remus, and he only keeps getting stronger. However, I have learned a couple of weaknesses of Harry's; weaknesses that need to be remedied. The first is that he knows a lot of spells, but he can't use them particularly well. At least not yet. I am certain that will be remedied as he continually practices dueling, and works with myself and Alastor. Secondly, while he knows a lot of spells that are useful solely for dueling, he has not really branched out far enough into other fields, like charms, or transfiguration. His spell variety thus leaves a lot to be desired. Thirdly, for all the spells he knows, Harry has little experience dueling. Fourthly, despite all the time and effort spent learning to dodge, Harry still seems to have not learned how to properly dodge out of the way of spellfire. Finally, while he has mastered Occlumency, he has yet to delve into Legilimency, which would help him in subduing a mass of opponents," Dumbledore explained.

"So, what do you need me for?" Remus asked.

"As you said earlier, you were particularly talented with runes and arithmancy, the latter field of which I was never particularly proficient in. While I am rather proficient with runes and wards, I believe what you have to teach him is more suited to a novice like Harry. I also expect that you too can show Harry some valuable tricks for his future duels. Lastly, but most importantly, you, by necessity, have spent an incomparable amount of time dealing with magical creatures. That is what I believe you can offer him," Dumbledore replied.

"What are you, Horace, and Alastor working on with him?" Remus continued.

"I am currently teaching Harry the fine art of Transfiguration, and more particularly, battle Transfiguration. Alastor is dealing primarily with dueling, and enhancing Harry's performance in a duelist ring, though he has his work cut out for him. Finally, Horace has been teaching Harry various spells that will serve him well, and some advanced potions-making," Dumbledore explained.

"So what exactly are my responsibilities?" Remus finished.

"I have hired you in the capacity of a tutor; someone any student can go to if they are having trouble in a particular class. Your secondary job will be giving any and all reasonable aid to Harry,"

Dumbledore finished. He stood up. "It is rather late Remus; why don't I show you to your quarters?"

"Harry"

"Bosom buddy"

"Old friend"

"How have you been?" the Weasley twins chorused to fully wake him up.

Harry rubbed his sleepy eyes. "How did you two get into Ravenclaw tower?"

They looked at each other. "Magic!"

"So what can I do for you two?" Harry asked curiously.

"Well old chap, we were kind of wondering about all the time you've been spending with Slughorn, Moody and Dumbledore," George explained.

"Dueling lessons," Harry replied still in a haze of tiredness, just realizing that the only reason they knew he was working with the Headmaster was because of the Map.

"They are working you rather hard for the holidays," Fred pointed out.

Harry stared at them. Seeing as it was the Christmas holidays, there was no one else in the Ravenclaw boys' dormitories. "Can I trust you two? Wait, hear me out. I mean, can I trust you two to know the truth and not go doing something stupid with it. This is very serious business," Harry finally said.

Fred and George exchanged grim looks at Harry's tone, realizing that this was serious. They nodded. "We swear on our pranking souls to keep your secrets."

Harry took a breath. "Last Saturday was Slughorn's Christmas party. I went with Hermione, and met up with Neville who met with Susan. Both of whom got kidnapped during the course of the evening, by professor Quirrell."

Fred and George's mouths opened in horror. "Quirrell!"

"What do you two know of possession? Never mind, bad question. He was possessed. By the specter of a wizard last seen Halloween of 1981," Harry explained.

If possible, the looks of horror on Fred and George's faces became even more pronounced. "No!" breathed Fred.

"I was able to save Hermione and Susan. And I'm all right now. Quirrell isn't. He's dead," Harry declared quietly.

"Did you-?"

"I had to, George. I came within two syllables of dying. I had nearly no energy left. And I feared what Voldemort would do if he retained control over Quirrell's body. There was no other option," Harry whispered.

"How- how did he die?" Fred whispered.

"The same way as the troll; a railroad tie to the chest. I imagine he went quickly, so at least he wasn't in too much pain," Harry replied sadly.

Fred and George stared at him, saying nothing. "He's still out there, boys. Plotting, planning, waiting for the next moment to strike. He will strike again. One of these days, he will return. On that day, I have to be ready," Harry breathed.

They were all silent for several long moments. "What can we do, Harry?" George asked after a while.

"I'm sorry?" Harry croaked. He didn't understand the question.

"Were Hermione and Susan in a lot of danger?" Fred whispered. Harry nodded grimly.

"What can we do, Harry?" George asked again. "He'll come for us too. And our family. What can we do?"

Harry rubbed his head. "Since I will be residing with you over the summer, your home is going to be given the highest level of protection. Plus, you're both from an all magical family." He saw their confused looks. "With the Ministry underage magic detectors as they are, if you do magic at your home, they will never be able to differentiate it from your parents. Because I'm emancipated, and legally an adult, I can do it outside of school too, though in my case, legally. Anyway, learn some basic things you can use in a duel; a shield charm, a stunner, things like that. That, more than anything, may save your lives some day," Harry finished tiredly. He looked at his watch. "I have to get dressed and going. I have training with Alastor Moody in a half hour. Please, keep this quiet, gentlemen. I don't think many people could handle the truth."

Fred and George left silently as Harry began rummaging through his trunk for his day's clothes.

"As always, good job tonight," Slughorn remarked, patting him on the shoulder.

"Thank you sir," Harry replied.

Slughorn walked over to his beverage container. "Here Harry, as a Christmas gift, let's have a drink," he said as he withdrew two chilled bottles of butterbeer.

"Thank you sir but I really..." He was cut off by a look from professor Slughorn.

"After all the times we've worked this year, I think you deserve a little break, especially seeing as it's Christmas," Slughorn said as he poured some butterbeer into two glasses.

Harry looked torn for a moment, but finally walked over opposite to Slughorn's desk, and took a seat.

"How much have you learned this holiday?" Slughorn queried.

"I've learned parrying from Moody; that was a big help. He also taught me a few more hexes: jacio, the flinging hex, deprimō, the depression spell, caecus, the blinding curse, percutio, the striking hex, and the servos shield are what we've covered to this point. With Dumbledore, we've moved on from shielding to battle transfiguration,

more extensive than say the lion conjuration you taught me. Finally, as you know professor, I've learned animating and animation charms, and a few other great spells: glacies curis, the ice spear, gelidus conifer, the frost cone, conicio obviam, the telekinesis charm, percutio incidere, which throws a short burst of electrical energy at a target, incendia grex, a firebird illusion, lux lucis, which created blinding light that's very effective against vampires, and finally, humus proeliator, a spell that transfigures the ground into an animated warrior construct," Harry recited.

Slughorn stared at him. "Harry, it isn't my place to say but..."

"What's wrong professor?" Harry asked.

He took a breath. "I applaud the effort you have put into your studies, but it is the Christmas holidays. Tomorrow is Christmas eve." He stared at Harry. "I remember Lily had the same obsessive streak you do when she got her mind set on a project. One time she was determined to find a better way to make pepper-up potion. For weeks on end she camped in the library referencing and cross referencing every ingredient and step to make the traditional potion. She did this throughout her sixth and seventh year. She finally presented her findings to me, and if you look in the credits section of any modern potions textbook, you will see her name there for all the hard work she put in. So I know the Evans work ethic."

He took another drink of butterbeer. "Yet I also remember how during parts of her sixth and seventh year she put so much effort into her research that she seemed close to a breakdown. She was frequently angry, edgy, and very hard to deal with.

"To be frank Harry, I'm worried the same might happen with you." He held up a hand. "Please, hear me out. You have accomplished more than perhaps any first year at Hogwarts, except perhaps Albus himself. You know how to cast spells most full-grown wizards and witches have trouble with. But all the hard work you are putting in... it just isn't healthy. These are the Christmas Holidays. I understand many of your friends have gone home, but still... I feel bad that you are forced to work harder than anyone else just to survive." He took a breath. "I worry about two things in regards to your future. The first is that Voldemort returns, and you will be forced to face him. The second... the second is that you finally win, but it a hollow victory, an empty victory.

"These moments... the Christmas holiday, they are an excellent time to relax, to reflect. I can admit that I have always liked comfort, so your willingness to continually work yourself to the breaking point seems rather alien. But I want you to enjoy life, just as your mother did. Your life should never amount to a pyrrhic victory," Slughorn finished.

Harry sat back in his chair. Your life should never amount to a pyrrhic victory. It was a good creed to live by. And as much as he didn't want to, he did want to have a chat with Remus, perhaps bury the hatchet. Maybe hang out some with Fred and George. And if he got bored... what was to stop him continuing his studies? "All right professor, perhaps you're right. What do you suggest?"

Slughorn beamed. "I'm glad you were able to see what I was talking about. Now then, I will handle Moody and Dumbledore; explain that you deserve a week off. And when we resume lessons, I'll have some truly interesting tricks to show you. But you more than anyone, need to take advantage of this holiday season." He reached behind his chair and pulled out a book. "This is a copy of the N.E.W.T. level potions book Advanced Potion-Making. I wanted to show you something in it, something that may save your life, but is only to be used in a case of near-death. Turn to pg. 50." Harry turned to 50, and noticed that the printed text of the book had been obscured by writing, in margins, and over the top of words. "Look in the lower left hand corner."

Harry's eyes lowered to the bottom of the page. "Sectumsempra- for enemies," he murmured.

"That curse is a very dark and a nasty one Harry. It is a slicing curse, similar in appearance to sticking a sword down someone's front. It is also very powerful. However, considering your year has involved slaying a troll and dueling You-Know-Who... I think it can be safely entrusted to you," Slughorn finished. "Before I forget, the counter is Vulnera Sanetur. I did help create the spell, after all."

"Thank you sir, for all your help." Harry walked over to the door. "Merry Christmas."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Lupin," Harry said neutrally as he walked into Remus' office.

"Harry! How are you doing? Come take a seat," Remus said gesturing to a chair. The man's enthusiasm was at least refreshing, Harry reflected as Remus grabbed a bottle of butterbeer and poured two glasses. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, sir-

"Moony or Remus, preferably," Remus interrupted.

"All right, Moony. I was very brash the other day when we first met, and I feel, if only for the sake of my father's memory, that I should give you another chance. So, if you have no objections, I would like to understand why you did not associate with me during my time at the Dursleys?" Harry asked.

Remus took a breath. "After the death of your parents... it was very hard for me. Of my best friends, one was dead along with his wife, one was dead to me, and the other was dead because of the traitor. I was a wreck for a good five years afterwards. Finally, Dumbledore got me on my feet again, and I tried to give up the bottle and get a job. The only problem was that in those five years, I'd been deafened to how other people generally treated werewolves. By that time, when I was moving from job to job and trying to make a living, thoughts that I could ever be a positive influence on your life vanished. A young child like yourself shouldn't be forced to deal with a broken down old werewolf. I know now how wrong I was; that you weren't okay. I'm sorry."

It took Harry a little bit of time to register that the man in front of him had it as bad as he did while at the Dursleys. He wasn't as petty as Snape was he; he couldn't hold a vendetta just because. He walked over and hugged Remus. "I'm sorry too..." he murmured. "Look, Moony, it's apparent the last ten years have been awful for both of us. I can't hate you, as much as I've tried. Just... don't let it happen again," Harry whispered.

"I won't abandon you ever again, Harry," Remus assured him.

"All right, emotional time is over, lets drink to the Marauders," said Harry, breaking the hug.

"To the Marauders," declared Remus as Harry retook his seat and raised his glass.

"Who will always remain in our hearts," Harry finished, draining his glass. Remus refilled both glasses. "So Moony, did Dumbledore tell you about the rather interesting conversation we had on Sirius Black?"

"He did not. Why on earth would you want to speak of him?" Remus near snarled.

"I took him to task for not properly investigating. One of my biggest problems with the whole thing is the reductor curse part." Remus stared at him. "Remus, why would a reductor curse leave just a finger? If I took out my wand and cast it at you the same way Black supposedly cast it at Pettigrew, a lot more than your finger would remain. Plus, Dumbledore admitted it was theoretically possible that someone else could have been the secret keeper. And from my father's descriptions of his later years, he seemed more the type. Add in that Sirius got no trial, or even an interrogation under Veritaserum, and where is that supposed to leave me in the whole messy deal?"

"How do you know all of that?" Remus croaked.

"I asked the goblins to investigate on my behalf. Apparently, when their only motive is to find the truth, instead of the 'look-good lies', investigations will turn up different results,' Harry commented.

"You really think- Sirius could...?" Remus stuttered.

"Yes. Peter was a rat animagus, was he not? All that is left at the scene is a finger, which could never have occurred via the reductor curse. Many witnesses stated the reductor curse was the only thing used that day. I believe Peter had already cut off his finger, and once Sirius confronted him, he screamed that it was Sirius who had betrayed m parents, killed the twelve people in the street behind him, dropped the finger, and escaped using his animagus form. My explanation makes a lot more sense. Or at least, the goblins' does," Harry finished.

"No- I couldn't have- he really might- the poor mutt," Remus muttered blankly.

"Dumbledore said he would investigate. I believe him. He has every interest in investigating the matter. Let's give the old man time and space to tell us what we already know," Harry finished.

They were both silent for a while, sipping their drinks, thoughts occupied by possibilities and "could-have-been" scenarios.

"So, after a week of vacation, I will restart my lessons," Harry finally said, if only to dispel the rather awkward silence.

Remus smiled. "Top of your class, dealing with magic far beyond NEWT's level, I've heard. I do applaud Horace's decision to convince you to take the week off. So, I was wondering: what would you like to learn from me?"

Harry sipped his butterbeer. "First off, I need to learn how to deal with magical creatures, especially the type that might find itself in Voldemort's employ. Like dementors or Lethifolds. Vampires I've already covered and giants are something I'll work on later, when I have some more magical power at my disposal."

Remus drank deeply from his glass. "There are many makeshift methods of dealing with those two magical creatures, both of which inconsistently work, and revolve around fire. The only certain way to drive those two creatures off is by using the Patronus Charm."

"Well then, that will be the first thing we work on," Harry replied.

"It is a very hard charm to master Harry. I don't want to push you and..."

"Remus, if I prove I can handle it, will you teach me?" Harry asked. He nodded. "All right, this doesn't get out; not to anyone. I'm invoking the Marauder's oath as protection." Moony's eyebrows rose. "I'm an animagus," he whispered.

Remus' eyebrows rose if possible higher. "I don't believe you, Harry," he replied quietly. Harry smirked and began shifting to his raven form. Remus stared slack-jawed at the raven sitting in Harry's seat.

Harry quickly resumed form. "Before you ask, I am registered; just nowhere the British Ministry would look. Funny enough, it's still legal. So I figure if I can handle being an animagus, then the patronus charm is something else I believe I can deal with."

"It took your father until fifth year to become one," Remus whispered, still awestruck. Finally he came back to reality. "How would I go about teaching it?" he mused.

"Well, maybe work with me until I perform the spell adequately, and then once it seems like I've gotten it, bring in a dementor or some kind of substitute and we'll work on it from there," Harry suggested.

"That could work," Remus replied slowly. "All right, we'll do it your way."

"After we work on that, maybe we should delve into arithmancy and warding," Harry continued.

"Both are very difficult subjects, but nothing I think you'll have particular difficulty with. You'll really like arithmancy. It starts off slow with basic calculations and understanding the magical properties of numbers, and then you go on to breaking spells down into equations. The next step, which isn't taught at Hogwarts, is spell creation. Clearly the last one is our eventual goal," Remus explained.

"That sounds like a lot of fun. However, learning warding seems like a more pressing concern. You see, I've negotiated with Dumbledore to stay with the Weasley family during the holidays." He saw Remus' face fall slightly. "Hey, don't worry; I'll make sure we see each other a lot over the summer. Anyway, part of the deal I brokered is that I get to watch Dumbledore enhance the property's wards. Trouble is, if I don't have a better grounding in wards and how they work..."

"Then your deal is worthless," Remus finished.

"Bingo, Moony," Harry responded.

"Yes, well, that won't be a problem. Tell you what, I'll show you the basics of the Patronus charm, and test you weekly to see how far you've gotten. That way, we can still cover runes, wards, and basic arithmancy," Remus compromised.

"Fair enough." Harry set down his glass. "Their journals told me a lot, but I'd like an answer from a close friend. What were my parents like?"

He and Remus spent the rest of the evening fondly reminiscing about Lily and James, and the Marauders' time at Hogwarts.

"Merry Christmas, Fred, George!" Harry shouted to wake the twins up.

They bolted out of their bed, bleary-eyed. "Harry, how are you in our dormitory?" Fred asked weakly.

"You two once let slip the password, and when the fat lady asked, I told her you invited me to Gryffindor tower for Christmas morning. I'm sure you meant to, and it just slipped your minds," Harry replied brightly.

At the mention of it being Christmas morning, all signs of Fred and George being tired vanished instantly. They both turned to look at their own beds, which sure enough, held piles of presents. Harry gestured to his own stack of presents, which was extremely large; he'd levitated it with him through the corridors. Of course, never having a proper Christmas before, any pile of presents was a large pile... Still Harry knew this was something along the lines of what Dudley would receive for Christmas.

"Oy, Fred George! Want to open presents?" shouted a freckly red-head as he bounded into the room while struggling to carry his own stacks of presents.

"Will you three keep it down!" demanded an older taller red-head with horn rimmed glasses as he walked in.

"Meet our brothers, Ron and Percy!" chorused the twins.

Harry turned to the one nearest to him. "Harry Potter," he said offering his hand.

"Blimey! I'm Ron Weasley," he said.

"Aren't you in Ravenclaw?" asked Percy suspiciously.

Harry turned to him. "Yes," he shrugged.

"How did you get into Gryffindor tower?" Percy queried.

"I climbed up the walls," Harry answered with a straight face. Percy stared at him. "Really? What do you think? I just told the Fat Lady the password, and explained to her that I'd been invited for some festive Christmas cheer with my friends the Weasley twins," Harry explained.

"Percy, don't be like that. If you can't get along with Harry for five minutes, imagine how difficult your summer will be," Fred pointed out.

"What are you talking about?" he asked slowly.

"Harry here is going to be residing at the Burrow this summer holiday," George answered with a grin.

"Wicked! We've got the Boy-Who-Lived!" Ron laughed.

"You're living at the Burrow? Why?" Percy demanded.

"Dumbledore wanted me someplace well protected. I wanted some place I could do my training and not be interrupted. He mentioned the Burrow, I mentioned warding. A few more odds and ends and we came to an agreement," Harry explained airily.

Only one word seemed to register with Percy. "Training! You can't use magic over the holidays."

"Sure I can. I'm legally emancipated. I pay taxes, I get to use magic. Seems rather fair. I can also seek employment and vote in the next ministerial election. Besides, I can't afford to get rusty. Never know when the next assassination attempt is going to be," Harry commented.

"Assassination attempts? Good thing you're not paranoid," Percy snarked.

"You'll notice professor Quirrell is no longer on staff. He's currently six feet under. He tried to kill me right before Christmas vacation

began. Alastor Moody will be taking his spot until the end of the year," Harry replied.

"Quirrell- but- he seemed-"

"Harmless? Looking harmless doesn't mean he is harmless. No, Quirrell made a choice to ally with the dark. He made a choice to ally with the remnant of the most powerful dark lord of recent times?" he whispered. "That choice cost him his life."

"You-know-who, no- No! He's dead! There's no-"

"We chatted briefly. He gave a recruiting pitch. I turned him down flat. He tortured my friends, I was forced to kill his vessel," Harry breathed heavily. "Quirrell." Silence ensued from Harry's proclamation.

"Why are you telling us this?" Ron asked bluntly. Harry was already beginning to dislike the youngest Weasley present.

Harry stared at him. "You heard what I said about living at the Burrow, right? But it's more than that, unfortunately. Your family has been associated with Dumbledore for the past thirty years or so. Your mother's two brothers have already paid the ultimate price during the first war. Knowing he's alive, and working on a way to return, almost ensures a second one. I imagine that no matter what, your family won't be kept above the fray when that finally happens. So why am I telling you? To prepare for the inevitable, to perhaps better help you understand the stakes. Above all, I want your family to know the truth. There could soon come a day when association with me is very dangerous. You all deserve to know what you're getting into, exactly what the future may hold."

"What would the future hold for you Harry?" Percy whispered.

"Murder; no matter what happens, when he finally returns, I will be high on his 'must be killed' list, perhaps even just a tad lower than Dumbledore. I see no way out of this predicament other than fighting. And in fighting... unfortunate things happen. I've already got blood on my hands... Quirrell's blood. Realistically, once Voldemort," he ignored the hisses of discomfort around him, "Finally returns, he will work to raise an army consisting of his former Death Eaters, the ones that got away, some new blood, and dark creatures like

Dementors and Lethifolds. I don't see how that army could be defeated without sweat... blood... tears... and most definitely death."

He made an attempt to smile in order to dispel the horrible truth he'd just revealed. "That dark time is a ways off. This is the time to count our blessings. If we don't enjoy this, then trying to endure what's ahead will seem meaningless."

After a few more moments of silence, Fred became determined to make this Christmas a memorable one. "Well, we can't have such grim tidings; it's Christmas!" he gestured to his twin. "Open your presents first, my handsome counterpart."

"Right away, my good twin," said George as he worked to distract everyone from the black news Harry had shared. Soon he had unwrapped boxes of chocolates, a few prank items, and a couple of new Quidditch robes, as well as his mother's home cooking and yearly sweater.

"We are so going to defeat Ravenclaw!" George taunted.

"So not!" Harry muttered.

"Percy, you're next up!" Fred interrupted.

"Er, I left them back in my dorm room," Percy replied, snapping out of his apparent trance.

"Well go get them! Ron, show us what you have while we wait for Percy!" Fred commanded as Percy left the room. Ron greedily began unwrapping his pile of presents, to show several boxes of candy, a new sweater, and some homemade fudge.

"I'll go next!" Fred declared as Percy began setting his presents down next to him. His presents included more pranking material, more candy, another sweater, and more homemade cooking.

Percy unceremoniously began opening his presents. He received many books in the place of candy. Harry glanced at a few of the covers.

"That's a good book for learning conjuration," Harry commented about the book in Percy's hand.

"Really?" asked Percy curiously, now interested in what Harry had to say.

"Yes, except that his whole section on animation is bunk. There are a few much better books on that topic the Standard Book of Spells series references," Harry informed him.

"Interesting," said Percy as he finished thumbing through the book, and turned to his few unopened parcels. He too had received a sweater and cooking from his mum.

"All right Harry. Let's see what you got," George said as all the Weasleys' turned to him.

"Blimey that's a big stack!" Ron muttered.

"You know, this is my first real Christmas," Harry replied.

"First real Christmas!" chorused all four Weasleys in definite horror.

"My 'relations' hated me, and I them. Enjoying holidays with them was never going to happen," Harry concluded. He could feel the Weasley's pitying stares, so he turned to his pile.

Harry gently took his first real Christmas present, what seemed to be a book of some kind. He felt for an opening, and gently pried the paper off of it. He knew that he would want to save that paper; a proper reminder of his first real Christmas. Out of the opening he created fell a book and a note. Harry picked it up the note, and recognizing Ollivander's familiar scrawl, quickly unsealed it.

Hello Harry,

Merry Christmas! From your correspondence, I know how well you are progressing at learning magic. Talk has even reached the Unspeakables, as Nicolas mentioned, about recruiting you. Oh how little the sad underlings know.

I imagine that soon, sooner than you might imagine, you will run out of traditional pieces of magic to learn. I will certainly do everything

possible to make that happen. On that day, your subjects of choice will be Arithmancy and Ancient Runes/Wards. Spell and runic modification, and possibly even creation, will become the next frontiers of magical study for you.

That of course is not leaving off what you might discover relating to Herbology, Magical Creatures, or Potions. Perhaps even the magic of the night sky and the oft mysterious history of the wizarding world.

Thus, I have sent another notebook. I recommend using your old one for notations and notes, and this one for magical discoveries. Both are enchanted exactly the same so that no one, without your permission, can ever access your life's work. I have also included another book on wand-crafting. I believe it will come in handy sometime soon.

Finally, I must commend you on your efforts to apologize and reform yourself. I am, once more, proud to call myself your advisor.

Have a merry Holiday, and see you shortly,

Emanuel Ollivander, advisor to the Potter Family

"What is it?" asked Percy gesturing to the leather-bound notebook.

"Magical discovery tracking book," Harry replied. He saw their looks of confusion. "Anything I discover I can jot down in that book for future reference, and no one can ever access it without my express permission."

"Who would get you that?" asked Fred curiously.

"Mr. Ollivander," Harry replied turning to his pile.

His Christmas gifts were much more varied than the Weasleys. From Slughorn he received a set of medicinal potions. Pomphrey had sent along a book on healing charms to stop his incessant questions on the subject. Dumbledore sent along ten one-of-a-kind-tomes.

"Why would the Headmaster, and I don't mean for this to sound insulting, send you so many rare books?" asked Percy.

"You'll notice that there are ten." Percy nodded. "He placed me with the Dursleys, my relations. I spent ten years there. There is one book for every year of hell I had to spend with them." He noticed Percy gazing longingly at the book on Transfiguration. "I can't lend that one out because dueling with Transfiguration will be my focus for the next few months. Maybe at the Burrow I'll be able to. However," he handed Percy his tome on Warding from Dumbledore, "Maybe that one will suffice." Percy nodded gratefully. He turned to the twins. "Want to borrow the potions book?" The twins nodded eagerly so Harry handed it off to them. "One you want to borrow Ron?"

"Nah, thanks Harry, I'm good," he replied hastily.

Harry shrugged and set his books aside, turning back to his Christmas presents. He received several boxes of candy from Anthony and Neville. Susan had sent a rather heartfelt note with her present.

Hey Harry!

I just wanted to wish you a Merry Christmas from me and my Auntie! I've recovered completely, though Auntie has given me several stern lectures about the Imperious curse and how to spot and resist it. I've told Neville that other than the whole getting abducted by Voldemort thing, it was a pretty good date.

Anyway, I wanted to thank you again for everything. Seeing as Quirrell can't be our defense professor, I wonder who will get the job next. Take care, Harry, and I'll be back soon.

Love,

Susan

P.S. My Auntie attached a letter for you to read.

Harry felt around the outline of her letter, and sure enough, he was able to peel off the attached paper. He smoothed it out and began to read what Madame Bones had to say.

Hello Harry,

I wanted to personally send you a letter thanking you once more for saving my niece's life. And to reveal potential complications that may ensue from such a charitable act of kindness.

As you may or may not be aware, the Wizarding World has many archaic rules. Archaic rules that reflect how much of a patriarchal society it is. As such, because you saved Susan's life, I am required to offer her hand in marriage as the head of the house of Bones. Again, there are many potential consequences for accepting or refusing. Please be sure to research before responding.

Best wishes,

Amelia Bones

"Guess I'll have to reply to that," Harry muttered, trying to contain his horror at the prospect of being married.

"What?" the Weasleys' chorused.

Harry sighed. "Because I saved Susan's life, the law dictates she must be offered to me as a wife." Jaws dropped around the room. "So I'll have to send back a no."

"NO?" shouted Fred incredulously.

"Yes, I'm not forcing someone to bloody marry me because I'm not a selfish arsehole! I didn't save her life thinking about cashing in some day. I don't know what the future holds; maybe we will get married some day. But not because I saved her life when we were eleven," Harry declared quietly. He saw the Weasley's skeptical looks. "All right, how would you feel if it were your younger sister's life I saved?" He saw their confusion. "If I saved your sister's life, your family would be legally obligated to engage her to me. She wouldn't be happy, would she, to be forced into marriage? So why would Susan or Amelia Bones be any happier?"

Fred, George, and Percy looked dubious at the prospect of their sister ever being unhappy to marry Harry, while Ron's face scrunched up. "What about with the troll?" he asked slowly.

"What about it? I was saving my own life, wasn't I? Then it doesn't really matter who else might have been saved because I didn't want to die. That's how the law's written Ron," Harry replied.

He turned to Susan's gift; a new wand holster, dragon hide. For my knight in shining armor who always needs to be quick on the draw, the tag read. It was of good quality, thought Harry. He turned pulled his wand and fastened it into the holster before strapping it to his belt. No more carrying it around in his pocket or up his sleeve, which Moody had taken to bugging him about.

Hermione's gift had a letter attached as well.

Dear Harry,

And I do mean dear. How have you been? Have you fully recovered from your injuries? I have, though mum and dad have been really freaked by the whole thing. I finally managed to convince them that it was a onetime deal, and that if I didn't go back, evil dark wizards might seek us out. My parents are going to want to meet you at some point to thank you.

Anyway, I included something I found while shopping in Diagon Alley. It is technically illegal under the Hogwarts charter, but I care more about communicating with you than any potential detentions I receive. Just say my name, and I'm sure you'll understand. We'll speak soon.

Love,

Hermione

Harry turned to her gift, a small glass hand-mirror. He thought this was an odd gift for Hermione to send him, but she had never failed his trust before. He picked it up, and said "Hermione?"

"Hermione's beaming face came into view almost instantly. "Harry! Merry Christmas!"

"Thank you Hermione! Merry Christmas to you too! Where on Earth did you find this?" Harry asked amused.

"An old second-hand store in Diagon Alley. I'd read about them before, which was good, because the shop keeper did not know what they were for, which is why I got them so cheap. This was their last set though," Hermione explained enthusiastically.

"Hermione, I hope you have a Merry Christmas, and we'll speak later, all right?" She nodded. "All right, how do I turn the mirror off?"

"Just put it down Harry. I'll see you later. Bye!" Her face disappeared from view as Harry set it down gently.

Remus had sent him a few copies of textbooks he already had on Ancient Runes and Arithmancy, though Harry liked the updated version better. Moody sent Harry a silver drinking flask which was a replica of his own. It's not Paranoia if they're out to get you, Potter, was scribbled on the attached note.

Harry had two gifts left, one a long box, and the other a lumpy bundle. He walked over the box first and took the note.

Hello Harold,

Word has reached us about your magical abilities at Hogwarts. It is good to see that our help has yielded results. Of course, come the summer holidays, more must be done.

Our memory program was a good start, so we have included more pensieve memories of spells that will significantly speed up learning time. We have also included some basic memories of Warding. It goes without saying that remembering them is not mastering them.

Finally, I must thank you for the return of my stone at high personal risk. It will not be forgotten. I am already preparing a suitable reward for your efforts.

Regards

P.S. if I might suggest it, you may wish to procure a second wand to use as a last resort.

Harry chuckled; nutty Unspeakables. He put the box aside, and turned to his bundle. He opened the package to let a silvery gray, fluid like material fall to the floor. Harry picked it up.

"Harry, your hands!" Shouted Fred.

Sure enough his hands appeared to have disappeared. Harry set it aside as his hands reappeared and read the note attached.

Your father left this in my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well.

A Very Merry Christmas to you.

After seeing so much of the Headmaster's writing through notations in his personal collection, how he thought Harry could not have known who had written the note was beyond him.

"That's an Invisibility Cloak!" whispered Ron excitedly.

"Been in my family for generations. Dumbledore's just getting around to returning it," Harry explained.

"How could an Invisibility cloak last that long?" asked Percy incredulously.

"My ancestors made it, and they were rather accomplished at enchanting things. It's lasted nearly 1500 years, and been passed down from Potter to Potter," Harry explained patiently.

"Damn, that's impressive!" Chorused the twins.

"Warding and enchanting at their finest," Harry commented. He stood up. "Well, I'm going to put my stuff away back at Ravenclaw tower. Snowball fight afterwards?"

Fred, George, and Ron nodded eagerly. Percy however seemed extremely disinterested. "Come on Percy, it's a nice day. It's Christmas! Snowball fight!" Percy glowered at him. "Come on! Coommme On!"

"Fine," he sighed.

"That's the spirit. It's Christmas!" Harry declared. "I'll put these in my dorm and meet you outside."

"Merry Christmas, all!" Albus Dumbledore bellowed as everyone else in the castle entered the Great Hall for Christmas dinner. He gestured to the haggard looking man with long black hair sitting right next to him. "I would like to introduce Mr. Sirius Black, who has been recently released from Azkaban prison."

Everyone else, the Weasleys, the incoming staff, including Remus Lupin, and the few other students who had remained at Hogwarts stopped dead in their tracks. Except Harry.

"Hey, Sirius!" he said walking over to the man and enveloping in a hug. "Merry Christmas!"

"Harry!" His hug was just as fierce.

Harry took the seat right next to him. "I'm assuming my evidence was convincing?"

"Yes Harry, it was. Cornelius was almost beside himself to grant Sirius his pardon," Dumbledore cut in.

"Which I'm sure has nothing to do with the fact that Barty Crouch was going to run for Minister in the next election," Harry replied offhandedly. He finally noticed that no one else, aside from himself, Sirius, and Dumbledore, had yet to sit down. He turned towards them, all standing there as still as statues. "Why so Sirius?"

"Harry, that's Sirius Black," pointed out Remus weakly as Sirius roared with laughter.

Harry turned to him. "You are? Hello sir, I'm Harry Potter. That's Albus Dumbledore. The thing right next to you is a chair. This is Christmas dinner." He turned back to Remus. "Are we through with the observations? Besides, we had this conversation yesterday. Not enough evidence, Sirius innocent, Dumbledore handling it. Ring a bell?"

Remus stared blankly. Finally he came to his senses and walked over to Sirius. "Padfoot," he said softly. He awkwardly held out a hand to be shaken. Sirius was having none of it; he crushed his long time friend in a hug.

"MOONY!" Sirius shouted jovially. Then he forced Remus down and messed with his hair. "You still have the really odd hair thing going on, Moony."

Remus broke free and his wand was in between Sirius and himself. The next second, Sirius's hair was pink and he was sporting a bright red clown nose.

Sirius went for his wand, and then realized that being recently released from Azkaban hadn't given him time to get a new one. Remus picked up on that, and a feral glint appeared in his eye. Sirius gulped.

"Truce! Truce!" shouted Harry. He turned to Fred and George. "May I present Messer's Padfoot and Moony?"

His words had the desired effect. All thoughts of Sirius being a former inmate of Azkaban were forgotten as the twins went down on their knees in front of them. "We're not worthy! We're not worthy!"

"See what a bad influence you two have been on the younger generation?" Harry mock-scolded.

Sirius pretended to wipe a tear from his eye. "I'm so proud! My life's work is now complete!"

"Yes, and with that, let us have a Merry Christmas Dinner!" Dumbledore's voice finally interrupted.

Remus sat down on Sirius's other side, as the teachers warily sat across from them, eyes boring into Sirius. Fred and George took seats on Harry's other side, with Ron and Percy taking the other two.

"Is this a more hostile reception than the one you got from the Slytherins after you and Beverly Parkinson...?" Harry whispered.

"You might be onto something, Harry," Sirius whispered back. McGonagall's stare was particularly unnerving.

"All right, let's stop this now. Hello, may I introduce you all to Sirius Black, my innocent godfather who has spent ten years in Azkaban. He has recently been released on new evidence, evidence I brought to light. So to recap: not the Potter's secret Keeper, didn't kill twelve

people with a single curse. Peter Pettigrew did. I know this; the Headmaster agrees with me. So let's move on," Harry declared.

From that point, the Christmas dinner went wonderfully. Sirius and Remus were in there element, boastfully reminiscing about their Hogwarts days. Fred and George were as over-the-top as could be. Even Percy joined in the festive atmosphere, humming along with the rest of the table when Fred, George, and the Marauders began outlandishly singing Christmas Carols. Dumbledore seemed to be in high spirits, amiably chatting away with Moody, whose eye kept rapidly spinning in his socket, resting on Septima Vector several times. It was the best Christmas Harry ever had; though it was also his first real one in truth.

After spending the day involved in snowball fights with the Weasley twins, Ron, and surprisingly enough, Percy, Harry went to catch up with Sirius and Remus. He found the Marauders in good spirits, in the process of reconciliation. Dumbledore, because of Sirius's inmate status, had hired him to work in the castle in a similar capacity as Remus. When Harry recollected how he'd single-handedly gotten the bat fired, Sirius burst into maniacal laughter, and stated that his only regret was that he couldn't have been the one to make "el greaseball" get the ax. Moody interrupted the proceeding halfway through to personally administer Veritaserum to Sirius. Of course, instead of actually asking about any past crimes, Moody really used the opportunity to learn every prank that the Marauders had played on him in the past. When Remus and Harry finally stopped laughing, and asked Moody why he'd done it, Moody growled, "What's a few drops amongst good friends like us?"

That night, Harry finally had a chance to review Flamel's gift. During his time at the Department of Mysteries over the summer, Flamel had hit upon an innovative way to prepare him for the future. Harry's magical power had already been quite ample, thanks to Voldemort's prodigious power merging with his own. Due to that, he was at a power level already similar to the above-average auror. Both Ollivander and Flamel assured him as he practiced, and the more diligently he practiced, the exponentially stronger his magic would get. It did awe him that Flamel projected he would be as powerful as Dumbledore at 25, though matching Voldemort could still be decades of work away.

The rub, however, was that he didn't really know magic. Without knowing magic properly, any rituals, especially the really obscure ones the Department had access to, would be nigh impossible. As such, his control over magic was sporadic at best. Ollivander could run him through drills, and give him extremely difficult charms, like the Disillusionment charm, which enhanced his control and it still wouldn't be enough to progress any further.

That was when Flamel introduced the concept of the subconscious control of magic. He posited to the both of them that there was a memory aspect to magic that would work to enhance control. As an example, he transferred a memory of the levitation charm to Harry. Within an hour, Harry had it working correctly. Of course, Flamel explained, if they used legilimency as he had, to transfer memories, there were bound to be negative side-effects on Harry's mind. That was where he proposed using memories of spells to be dispensed via pensieve. By collecting memories of various aspects of magic, and how to properly use spells, they could be given to Harry, who would absorb them at his own leisure. The absorption would significantly reduce Harry's learning curve, without harming his mind. Indeed, the first real practical test, the Disillusionment charm, had taken him a week to master. Learning the charm went so much faster with the memory to guide him on doing it properly, while it generally took weeks to learn regularly. Harry owed his rapid success to Nicolas's brilliant idea.

Harry looked over the list Nicolas had sent him. It was an incredibly diverse list filled with many different types of magic, from illusion spells to extremely complex transfigurations. And Nicolas had included memories on spell-weaving and spell-chaining, some of the most powerful magic for dueling. Harry smiled, his fanatical training had already put him on course to pass Dumbledore before thirty, and this was just the thing he needed to take it to the next level. Of course, it was fair to say that the older the Headmaster became, the less magic he could use, as it was naturally redirected itself to slow down the effects of aging. Nevertheless, soon, quite soon, sooner than anyone else could have predicted, his power would eclipse Dumbledore's.

"Enter," declared a rough voice from the inside of a room lit only by candles. He had just been about to make an important point to his comrades, when a figure dressed in black, like the room's initial occupants, crossed the threshold.

"My apologies for being late, your highness," the figure who'd just entered told the apparent leader. He took the one remaining chair in the circle that the others had made.

The leader turned to him. "Why were you late?" he asked softly.

"His Royal Majesty asked me to present him with the financial report. I could not leave without drawing attention. I am sorry. What have I missed?"

"We were discussing the possibility of putting our plans into action during this human time of celebration," the figure to the leader's right informed him.

"I have never understood why we use the wizard tongue when speaking of such matters," muttered someone a few seats down from the leader.

"Simply because most of our brethren only know enough to interact with Wizards," the leader replied. "Anyway, as I was saying, our plans for the rebirth of our society can't be implemented yet. You have all heard the details of the coming conflict with the dwarves?"

Everyone else nodded in unison. The figure next to the late arrival spoke up. "I fail to see why that should prevent us from striking," he replied.

"Because, when we strike, we need to do it with everyone else focusing elsewhere. What we need to do is not something that everyone will understand or support... initially."

"I understand that, sir, but if we act while in the midst of war, then..."

"I have already sent emissaries to make certain that war can be settled with my ascension to the throne," the leader growled, clearly annoyed at the questions. "But these matters distract us from what is important. Simply put, we need the war to mask our movements, and that is why we must delay until summer time. Besides, now is a perfect time to make sure there are no loose ends left unsettled."

The leader turned his head until he gazed steadily at the last one to arrive. Everyone else followed his gaze. "Now then, as we agreed at

an earlier session, we need wizard involvement to ensure the nation's rebirth. I have already selected the perfect... candidate." He paused dramatically, making sure he had his co-conspirators' undivided attention. "Now then, tell us about Harry Potter, Master Gladrock."

To Elucidate: I apologize for the brevity of the preceding chapter. To compensate, this one is double the length of the last one. Additional chapters of An Education, My Life In Another Dimension, and In The Service Of An Eagle, will come during the next update: Saturday, Feb 19, in between the hours of 3 to 5 pm. Following that update, I will be moving to Vermont, so, there are certain to be no updates for Feb 26, and most likely no updates for March 3. March 10, however, I can promise an update, as well as the one-shot expansion project I have mentioned on my profile. On March 10, Mentored By The Grey will transform from a one-shot into a full- novel length story. Additionally, on that day, I believe I can finally return to a once a week posting schedule. Thanks once more to all who have taken their time to read, and an additional thanks to all who have reviewed as well. Have a good night, everyone!

Chapter Ten: Calm Before The Storm

"Are you all right, Padfoot?" Harry asked concerned as his stray bludgeoner caught him in the chest and blasted him to wall.

"Harry, it's not a serious wound unless it's a Sirius wounded," Sirius admonished as he clutched his chest, "And I am so wounded. Get me to the hospital wing," he commanded before fainting.

Harry started levitating towards the hospital wing, but not before drawing a pencil moustache above his lips and adding on funny glasses and a fake nose.

Madam Pomphrey began giggling after one look at Sirius' face. "He's been a very bad influence on me," Harry replied to her unanswered question. "I do hope, that should he inquire about why you are laughing, you make sure to mention my meeting Remus in the halls on the way to the hospital wing," Harry winked.

"There you are, Potter," growled Moody once Harry exited.

"Sorry professor, I had to take Sirius to the hospital wing... again. When I told him ten years in Azkaban meant he was thoroughly out of shape, he refused to believe me. I hope this time he gets the message," Harry explained.

A half-hour later, Moody and Harry were dueling outside, in what could easily be described as a blizzard. Neither rain nor shine nor snow nor sleep... would curb Moody's fanaticism. Having hexes fired at a person at high velocity with nearly no visibility was as difficult to stop as it sounded. The lesson in this was how external conditions effected a duel, and to make sure to pick and choose battlegrounds. It was also a refresher course on why the human presence revealer was very useful in a duel. Finally, as darkness finally fell, and Harry lost for the umpteenth time, Moody let up, and they journeyed back to the castle.

"Term resumes tomorrow," Moody pointed out gruffly.

Harry nodded. "It's going to be busy; my schedule is, you, Dumbledore, Moony, Sirius, Slughorn, pretty much every night of the week." Harry's face broke out in a grin. "At least I won't get bored."

Moody's grin reflected Harry's enthusiasm. "Most kids your age would run away at the thought of having this much work."

"Aren't most kids my age turning into a flammable pile of emotions that catches fire over the opposite sex and life in general?" Harry pointed out.

"Soon you'll be like them, Potter. Especially when girls figure out the-Boy-Who-Lived is the premium item in the castle. Good ole hormones," Moody countered.

"Moody, could you just put me in stasis once my hormones begin to act up?" Harry begged. If he was a moody, antisocial brat now, he'd hate to see himself in puberty.

"Nah, with your Occlumency you should be fine," Moody replied easily. "Good shielding by the way; should even be strong enough to resist a veela's allure. Ollivander really did an excellent job in teaching it to you. Of course, you already know the next step."

"I am working on it," Harry replied.

"Good. Well, this is where I leave you," he said, gesturing to his office. Harry walked to the Great Hall to get some dinner before his lessons with Dumbledore. He idly chatted with the Weasley twins, and Percy, who seemed rather eager to discuss warding. He might be a rather pompous and occasionally annoying individual, but an ambitious boy like Percy could prove a useful ally at a later date.

"Enter Harry," Dumbledore's voice rang out before he could knock.

"Okay, it's a perimeter charm, a see-through door, or really advanced legilimency," Harry posited as he entered the office. Dumbledore's eyes just twinkled merrily. "So what are we working on tonight, sir?"

"I thought, before we progressed any farther, I might teach you spell weaving. Now then, spell weaving is merging wand movements and magic to conjure or transfigure something beyond the limitations of regular transfiguration. For example, you know how to conjure a lion, and you know how to make objects grow. So with spell weaving..." he waved his wand and a huge lion appeared in the center of the room, "A much larger lion than normal becomes a possibility."

Harry had seen spell-weaving from the memories Flamel sent along, but Dumbledore's coaching made the already fast process go at lightning speed. By the end of the evening, Harry's bird conjuration could consist of pigeons as big as vultures.

"As always Harry, wonderful work," Dumbledore called as Harry exited his office. Harry shook himself as he left; he might need Dumbledore's tutoring, but that didn't mean he wanted to stay around the man any longer than was required.

"HARRY!" He looked up from his book just in time to have his eyes covered by a soft fur coat.

"Hello Hermione," said Harry chuckling and standing to properly hug her. She blushed slightly, and her arms got slightly tighter around Harry.

"I missed you," she whispered.

"I did too. How about we stop giving the common room a show?" he said releasing her. Indeed, many people were staring at them. The females among them, staring rather wistfully at that. I'm eleven, you bloody pedophiles, Harry screamed mentally.

She blushed again, and took a seat next to him. "How was your holiday?" she asked.

"Great. I did a lot of work with Dumbledore, and a few other people. I'll introduce you to two of them, soon. How was yours?" he asked in return, dreading the answer.

Hermione sighed. "My parents were a wreck over what happened. Their first instinct was to withdraw me from Hogwarts. Then they wanted me supervised at all times. Finally, they settled on me learning to defend myself properly."

"Well there's some good news on that front," Harry interrupted. "Alastor Moody is taking over DADA classes for the rest of the year. Plus, Dumbledore has hired Remus Lupin and Sirius Black as tutors, so they'll be willing to teach you defense."

Hermione went very still, as if she was trying to decide something. Harry was contemplating turning back to his book when she finally spoke. "Could you teach me, Harry?" she asked in a near whisper.

Harry was silent for a moment. "Just because I'm a good student, Hermione, doesn't mean I'm a good teacher as well. I also really don't have the time; every night of the week next term, I have training with the various faculty of this castle. Adding in homework... well, I think I'm prime candidate for a mental breakdown. If I have some free time, I'll try to teach you defense. However," he reached into his bag for his favorite book, "This book has taught me so much about dueling. It lists the best basic spells for dueling Hermione. Learn from this, and I'll see about having more free time to teach you Second year. All right?" he asked tentatively.

Hermione held his favorite book in her hands, feeling it over. She opened it. Harry could only guess as to what she was doing. She closed it with a snap, and hugged Harry again. "Thank you so much!" she whispered gratefully.

"So you did all your homework?" Harry asked teasingly.

Hermione didn't bite. "Oh yes, I especially liked that two-foot essay for Binns. What did you think about...?" They easily chatted away the rest of the night; the events prior to the holiday blissfully forgotten.

"What the hell is your problem!" An angry voice demanded as Harry made his way down what he thought was a deserted corridor. He turned around. No one. He heard a slap, and finally registered it was coming from the room he was passing.

"NO! I WON'T CHANGE HOW I LOOK! I THOUGHT YOU WERE DIFFERENT!" shrieked another angry voice. Harry could at least tell this voice belonged to a female. There was an audible slap. Harry decided he should get the hell away.

Before he could make a voice, the door next to him was violently pulled open, and a burly seventh year, something Jenson, stepped out. "The others were right; you really are an ice queen!" he snarled. "I can't believe I wasted my time with that bitch!" he muttered as he walked away, completely ignoring, or perhaps not even seeing,

Harry. The girl's angry tears were the only sound left in the otherwise silent hall.

Harry quietly moved over to try and see who was there. It was Nymphadora Tonks who was angrily weeping into her hands as she slumped against the wall. Harry considered just leaving, not getting involved at all. How wonderful it would be to not voluntarily pile the weight of the world on his shoulders.

But as he tried to will his feet to carry him away, he had a change of heart. Flashes of his time at the Dursleys, when he wanted someone, anyone, to try and ease his pain, only to have more added to it, overwhelmed him. It might be really awkward, but if he could help her, he should. He would.

Harry quietly walked into the room, and kneeled down next to Tonks. "Are you all right?" he asked gently. He knew it was a stupid question, but she deserved an opportunity to rant.

Tonks instantly looked up, and her face went white when she saw Harry. "I'm fine," she sniffed, attempting to wipe her face on her robes.

"No you're not. Please don't insult my intelligence," Harry replied gently. Tonks looked ready to hit him. "I only came in because I thought you could use a friendly ear. If my presence isn't welcome, I understand, and I'll leave." Harry stood and made a move for the door.

Tonks made up her mind. "No- don't-." Harry quickly hopped back down, and threw an arm around Tonks.

"Now tell Lord Black what the problem is, Ms. Tonks-Black, and he'll try and make it better," Harry said in a mock-grandfatherly voice.

Tonks managed a watery chuckle. Finally she sighed. "Just another one of my relationships dying a horrid death," she mumbled.

"Why do they all not work out?" Harry asked concerned.

"Because all blokes want from me is to change into their dream girl," Tonks hissed. She was silent for a moment. "Maybe he's right," she whispered weakly. "Maybe-"

"No," Harry said firmly. Tonks stared at him. "I can already tell what you're thinking and it's a bad idea." She motioned for him to continue. "Do you really think you'd be happier by giving in and transforming?" Tonks' mouth fell open. She tried to muster a defense. "Tonks, you're a special girl. Just because you haven't met the right guy doesn't mean you should lower your standards. Why is it unreasonable that you'd want a boyfriend who doesn't want you to change on demand?"

Try as she might, Tonks couldn't answer that question. She chose to keep silent.

Harry sighed. "Tonks, if you want any kind of relationship, you're going to need a more mature person. I don't think anyone in Hogwarts qualifies. I don't think there's anyone in this school who'd treat you as you deserve to be treated; like a princess. Guys like Jenson... their thinking with their little head. The only guys who can think properly in this castle are the teachers."

Tonks pulled Harry closer instinctively. "You're mature," Tonks whispered, almost determined to prove him wrong, to show him that there was someone... anyone, who might fit the bill.

"Yes, and I'm also eleven, have an army of Death Eaters after me, and the Lord of your house- hence a close relation. You think me can make this work?" Harry asked in mock seriousness.

"You won't be eleven forever, I'm only six years older, I want to be an auror, so I could if need be protect you if need be, and any pureblood you date is a close relation," Tonks countered almost on principle of not wanting to lose.

"Tonks, are you so desperate that you're trying to talk yourself into dating an eleven year old?" Harry asked incredulously. She blushed and looked away. "Granted, in a few years, oh the fun we could have..." he teased. Her hair turned red, and she looked at Harry with wide eyes. He grinned back. Thank you, Ollivander.

Tonks got up and brushed off her robes. "In that case, Lord Potter-Black, perhaps in a few years, I will take you up on that offer," she teased as she walked out the door. Before she left, she turned and threw a saucy wink at him. Harry gulped. Damn you, Ollivander!

Harry joined Hermione and Anthony after lunch the next day. It was a quick walk to their Defense classroom, and they had arrived early, so they were the first ones there. They talked quietly as students started to liter in. Finally, when the bell rang, and the entire class was inside, they all turned to the front, expecting Moody. He wasn't there.

Harry saw a flash of red light coming his way, and quickly dived out of the way, his wand in hand. From under the desk, he saw Moody stunning students, probably as a lesson in Constant Vigilance. Two could play this game.

Harry sent three banishers at Moody, whose magic eye spotted them, and he turned and batted them away. That gave Harry time to transfigure the desk next to Moody into a lion, one which was quickly cut down by a Moody cutting curse. In response, Moody sent a barrage of cutting curses his way, that Harry raised a block of marble to shield against.

Harry waved his wand, and the marble residue became a flock of large falcons. He'd used this maneuver many times as a defense in dueling. Simply send the birds to take any curse sent his way. Meanwhile, Moody had continued stunning students; students who apparently hadn't caught on. Only Harry, Hermione, and Moody were still conscious.

Moody turned his full attention on Harry, sending a constant stream of stunners that his conjured birds had to block. Finally, one of his birds wasn't quick enough, and Hermione was stunned.

"Excellent work Potter. At least someone cares about Constant Vigilance!" he grumbled.

"Did you see Turpin and Patil, still sitting there like statues! What were they waiting for; you to start throwing AK's around?" Harry ranted.

Moody chuckled. "It's the ones who don't give a rat's ass about Constant Vigilance you have to be on the watch for. Wake the students on your side of the room," he commanded.

Harry set to work reversing the stunning charm on the students nearest him. A minute later, everyone else was groggily getting to their feet.

"Congratulations! If I were a Death Eater, my job would have been incredibly easy! So thanks for that!" Moody barked. "I went for Potter first, because he's the one I've worked with, and by extension, the most dangerous opponent in this room. He was still on his feet when this drill ended. No one else was." He turned to Harry. "POTTER! The few seconds you wasted trying to assess the situation could have allowed me to cast some incredibly powerful magic! That bird defense also impaired your ability to curse me! What the hell was that transfigured lion supposed to do!" He turned back to the class. "Now imagine how pitifully you all did," he growled.

Finally, after a few more minutes of brutal critique, Moody walked to the front as everyone retook their seats. "My name's Alastor Moody, and for the rest of the year, I'm your Defense Against The Dark Art's teacher."

"What happened to professor Quirrell?" asked Padma tentatively.

"Dark wizard infiltrating Hogwarts," Moody replied gruffly.

"Quirrell!" replied Padma incredulously.

"Yes, Quirrell. What, just because he didn't have a cape, wasn't particularly nasty, or didn't look like a Dark Wizard, you could be absolutely sure he wasn't!" Thundered Moody. There was silence at that proclamation. "Quirrell has since kicked it." There was a stunned silence at that. "Imagine if his infiltration mission required hostages. How helpless would you all have been?" Hermione was shaking slightly, so Harry put a comforting hand on her shoulder. "CONSTANT VIGALENCE!" he roared. "Maybe next time, I won't be able to stun everyone except Potter. Maybe next time his guard will slip, and I'll have a complete set," Moody cackled. "Now then, to today's lesson..."

Moody's lesson was on the body-bind curse, and how to use it. Harry tuned out mostly, since he could already cast it silently. Hermione took more detailed notes than Harry had ever seen her take. At the end of the lesson, everyone scurried for the doors, including Hermione, who still looked shaken.

"How did he lose his leg?" asked Anthony once they were in the hall.

"Evan Rosier took it from him. He repaid Rosier by taking his life," Harry replied.

Hermione looked close to tears and she began to hyperventilate. Harry draped an arm around her. She looked up at him. "It'll be all right, Hermione. Relax." He led her away towards their dormitory, where they could have some solitude while Hermione unwound.

It was smooth sailing from here onwards. The next four months passed in a peaceful blur for Harry. Their match against Slytherin was a quick win, with Harry at seeker. Neville's grades had increasingly leapfrogged other students. And Slughorn, Dumbledore, Sirius, Remus, and Moody pushed Harry far past what he thought were his limits.

Dumbledore had given him a crash course in Legilimency after Harry swore he wouldn't abuse it. Occlumency was so much easier, Harry reflected. Still, Harry could easily invade an unoccluded mind. It was invading another Occlumency practitioner's mind that gave a lot of trouble. After a month and a half of lessons on Legilimency, they'd moved back to transfiguration. This time they dealt with using both mass transfigurations and spell weaving to conjure a variety of objects in battle; from lions made of flame to ballistic water ducks.

Sirius and Moody had assumed the roles of sparring partners. In the beginning, Harry would barely be able to last five minutes, before he would make a critical mistake and lose handily. Now, duels could easily go on for a half an hour before he would finally falter. Moody and Sirius, once the old dog had finally gotten back into something resembling form, had many tricks to show him, most notably the flame-whip defense. By channeling magic into the end of his flame-whip, he could parry curses that came towards him. The danger was overextending the whip to the point where it wasn't quick enough to catch curses, and all the magic that was poured into it would limit his options in a duel.

Slughorn still had some gems to teach Harry, such as a few more dark curses like the compression curse and the bone-shattering curse, but he quickly switched fields. Harry's ability at Potions, courtesy of his mother's notes, inspired the genial Potion's master to

begin teaching him how to brew regeneration and rejuvenation potions, as well as antidotes.

This was even more valuable since Remus began teaching him about warding. One of the simplest wards to enact was a preservation ward on potions vials. Just two carvings, and a little magic infused, and potions in the designated vials wouldn't spoil. Ever. Unless of course the rune decayed. Which, if not properly reinforced periodically, would happen. Remus had only covered the basics of runes, such as the most common symbols and runes, and then moved onto ward arrays.

At the center of a ward array were the runic carvings, among which was the power capacitor. It continually absorbed and allotted power to maintain the attached wards. The other carvings represented the attached defenses anchored to the array. As the ward array continually worked to defend the surrounding area, it gradually became more powerful over time, representing the build-up of magic used in reserve to reinforce the attached defenses.

Remus first taught Harry how to construct a ward array, including the traditional combinations of runes used to power a ward construct. Then they progressed to traditional defenses, such as an anti-apparition ward. After he taught Harry how to tie multiple wards together to create a ward array, thereby completing the crash course in wards, he moved on to how to defeat wards. From the traditional method of just throwing a lot of magic at the wards and trying to overpower them, to the varying methods of finesse useful in temporarily neutralizing a ward, just long enough to sneak through. He didn't go into detail, but he did show Harry a few basic ward-busting methods.

For the last month, Moony had switched to teaching him Arithmancy. Just the basics; the magical properties of numbers, how those numbers worked to become spells, and basic ways to breakdown spells into number sequences. Remus had promised much more in the way of spell-crafting the next year.

Regular classes had long since lost their appeal to Harry. Considering the Transfigurations he performed was regularly beyond NEWT level, turning pillows into hedgehogs was just too easy. History of Magic had no appeal, and the same was true of Astronomy. Potions, as Slughorn would regularly point out, held no

challenge for Harry. Flitwick delighted in Harry's ability at Charms, which was also far above NEWT level. Dumbledore had mentioned that the following year, when Moody left the DADA post to return to retirement, it was Flitwick who would take his place in the rotation of Harry's mentors.

Harry had developed a good rapport with the Charms master. During their private meetings, they regularly discussed the latest in charms, transfiguration, and potions. Flitwick considered him a gem amongst his Ravens. He'd even taken to trying to teach Harry gobbledegook, and though Harry's focus was often elsewhere, there were many phrases he could still remember.

The only classes that had new material for him Defense Against the Dark Arts and Herbology. He knew next to nothing about plants, and though he generally wasn't that interested, Slughorn assured him knowing how to differentiate plants might be useful someday. As for DADA, every lesson with Moody potentially had something interesting.

But the time he spent in those five classes, doing homework, and whatever else, could be better spent elsewhere. That was why he was going to speak with the Headmaster during their next lesson.

"Excellent work, Harry," Dumbledore had complimented after the day's lessons.

"Sir, I was wondering if you had a few moments." Harry said politely.

"Certainly, Harry. What can I do for you?" Dumbledore asked kindly.

"Well, sir, I was wondering... Considering all of the work I've done in Charms, Potions, and Transfiguration, and much of a self-study course History of Magic really is, not to mention how uninteresting Astronomy is- is there any way I can test out?" Harry asked in a rush.

Dumbledore sat pondering for a few moments. "While I don't want you to be seen as receiving special treatment-

"Sir, I am destined to battle Voldemort," Harry interrupted. "It's not special treatment; it's survival training. The time will be spent well."

"I understand that, Harry. But I could never reveal the real reason. However..." he was silent for a moment. "Unfortunately, I don't believe you could take the Astronomy OWL's already, so you will have to remain in that class. However, If you went to the Ministry, and completed the OWL's, and NEWT's for all of the other subjects, then..."

"NEWT's for History of Magic?" Harry asked aghast.

"Unfortunately Harry, the Hogwarts rules such as they are, only allow the dropping of classes after taking the OWL's at fifteen, or when the student in question has already taken their NEWT's. So yes, you would have to pass your NEWT's in History of Magic as well," Dumbledore explained.

"So if I spent my summer studying, could I take the exams in August before I return to Hogwarts?" Harry asked eagerly.

"Yes you could," Dumbledore replied, his eyes twinkling. "Of course, to ensure your time at Hogwarts was productive, it would be my solemn duty as Headmaster to ensure a higher standard of education, with personal instruction."

"Perfect. Now then, there's one more thing. Am I staying with the Weasleys, or Sirius, over the holidays?" Harry asked.

"Unfortunately, Harry, as part of the deal I negotiated to secure his release, Sirius was forced to renounce all guardianship claims over you. Cornelius could not be seen potentially entrusting the Boy-Who-Lived to an ex-convict, especially during an election year. However," he saw Harry's frown, "He doesn't have to be your guardian to see you over the holidays." Harry caught on immediately. It wasn't like Fudge was going to be able to tell how much time he spent with Sirius over the holidays. "If that is all Harry, there is some paperwork I have to catch up on."

Harry got up and headed for the door. "Goodnight, Headmaster," he called as he left.

"Working hard, Hermione?" Harry teased as he sat down beside her. She had all her notes and textbooks piled out in front of her.

She glared at him. "Some of us," she hissed gesturing at herself and Anthony, who was also draped over his notes in preparation for the upcoming exams, "Actually need to study."

Harry glanced around the tower to see everyone else in view mimicking Hermione and Anthony. "Want me to test you?" he offered.

Hermione's eyes lit up. Five minutes later, they were covering the theory of the levitation charm. After an hour of quizzing her, Harry had had enough.

"Hermione, you'll do fine," he said as he closed the book he was testing her out of and leaned back in his chair. She moved to argue. "You didn't miss one question I asked. Come on, all this studying isn't good for you; take a breather."

She hesitated, but finally put her notes aside. She too began stretching back in her chair. "How was your lesson tonight?" she asked unconcernedly.

"Fine. I talked with Dumbledore. Over the summer, I'm going to complete OWL's and NEWT's in Potions, Transfiguration, Charms, and History of Magic." He saw Hermione's mouth open wide. "Hermione, before you say anything, understand that I am only doing this to have more time to devote to private lessons. And to make time to teach you," he added quietly. Hermione wrapped him in a hug. "Since most of my lessons will be during the weekdays, I think weeknights next year I can try and teach you how to duel."

Her grip only got tighter. "Thanks Harry," she whispered into his ear.

"You won't be thanking me after our first lessons. If you want to learn to duel, you have to be willing to do a lot of work. Hermione, I'm going to say this up front- you have to make a commitment. If you want to learn to duel..." He trailed off.

"I will Harry," she assured him. "I've been reading that book you've lent me; such a fascinating read. I could only get a few of those charms to work."

"Keep practicing. Especially summoning and banishing charms. When we finally begin dueling, I will not hold any punches," Harry declared quietly.

"I will, Harry" she repeated. "What about Anthony, Neville, or Susan?" she whispered

"I offered, but they decided they wanted to keep working on their own. I was as upfront with them as I was with you; it will be hard work- broken bones, cuts, bruises- those will be the norms. Study up on some healing charms. I'll do them at for you at first, but you really need to know how to do your own," Harry replied.

"Harry, I'll be fine," Hermione whispered back.

"How did it go, Harry?" Neville asked as they walked out of their final exam; transfiguration.

"Aced all of them, Nev," Harry replied. "How busy is your holiday going to be?" he asked.

"Gran's taking me to France to visit some relations," he replied

"Really, Longbottom? Why does your feeble grandmother waste such time with a squib like you?" drawled Malfoy.

Harry subtly poked Neville to stop him from reacting. He turned to Malfoy, "I'm sorry, do we know you?"

He flushed angrily. "You know me, Potter!" he snarled.

He looked at Neville and shrugged. "I do?"

"I think that's... Malfay was it?" Neville answered, playing along.

"Isn't he kind of like one of my annoying twelfth cousins or something?" Harry asked as Malfoy grew redder, and stalked off with his bodyguards in tow.

"That was fun," Harry commented idly. "Anyway, I know we already discussed this once, but next term, I will be giving Hermione dueling

lessons. If you want to join, you're more than welcome. However, as I warned you previously, I won't go easy on you."

Neville was silent for a moment. "I mentioned to my Gran that you'd offered to teach me how to duel," he admitted after a moment. "Every day since, she has been sending me messages urging me to reconsider. You have a reputation similar to a young Albus Dumbledore, mate. My parents...." he was silent, struggling with the words, "I want to make them proud," he finally whispered.

Harry clapped a hand on his shoulder. "I understand," he said firmly. "I know what your grandmother and parents would want, but what do you want?"

Neville stared at him. "I want to make myself proud," he mumbled lamely.

"Now say it with a little more feeling and act like you give a shite," Harry commanded.

"Here's to the end of another year, Headmaster," Harry said as they finished up the nights exercises, multiple simultaneous transfigurations. This was used to gradually increase the number of objects that could be conjured or transfigured at the wave of a wand.

"Before you depart, Harry, I have some news I must share with you," Dumbledore told him. Harry took his seat across from the Headmaster.

Dumbledore withdrew a letter from his desk. "You may have already received a copy of this letter, but from the expression on your face, I believe otherwise. The goblins sent me this letter to make sure the message was received. According to the letter, there is an urgent problem with the Potter Accounts that means they need to meet with you at your earliest convenience." Dumbledore folded the letter and tucked it back into his desk.

"As you know, Harry, from spending time with Filius, when goblin's say "earliest convenience" they really mean "drop everything you're doing and come this instant." Upon getting off the Hogwarts Express tomorrow, you should head for Gringotts almost immediately after explaining to the Weasleys where you are headed."

Harry gulped and nodded at that. Flitwick had made sure to emphasize how goblins had no patience; for any summons, a person had 48 hours to get to their nearest Gringotts branch or the goblins would start legally applying penalties for making them wait. Penalties included a percent of a person's vault as a "late fee." Harry would rather not have the goblins divvying up his small fortune while he was still alive.

"I'll go right after getting off the Express and meeting the Weasleys," Harry assured him. "How long do you think this take?"

"Goblins are known for their brevity. I imagine the meeting won't even make you miss the Weasley's homecoming feast," Dumbledore replied unconcerned.

"Shall we head to the feast, Headmaster?" Harry asked to get off of this uncomfortable topic.

"Yes Harry, let's," said Dumbledore as he stood up. "I would not wish to deprive anyone of a wonderful feast before there reunions with their families."

Harry walked into the Great Hall only to have Hermione, Anthony, and Terry call him over to where they were sitting. Other students greeted him in passing, and the Weasley twins stood up and bowed.

"What did I miss?" Harry asked Anthony as he sat down.

Anthony shrugged. "Hermione here was just telling me how wonderful she did on our exams. While at the same time complaining she was second in our year."

Hermione glared at Harry. "Your studying with me was deliberate sabotage, wasn't it?" she snarled angrily.

Harry laughed heartily. "Hermione didn't I beat you by a wide margin?" This clearly wasn't winning any points with the agitated witch. "Besides, didn't you already admit I was the next Dumbledore? Think of it this way, you're first among normal mortals." Hermione's terse reply was cut off by Dumbledore arriving and the babble in the Great Hall dying away.

"Another year gone!" Dumbledore declared cheerfully. "I won't trouble you too much with an old man's wheezing before we sink our teeth into this delicious feast. The house cup needs awarding, and the points are as follows: In fourth place is Hufflepuff with three hundred and seventy six, in third place is Slytherin with four hundred and forty one, in second place is Gryffindor with four hundred and seventy six, and the winner of the house cup is Ravenclaw at five hundred and two."

The Ravenclaws broke out into jovial and wild cheering at winning the house cup away from Slytherin and dethroning them. The Hufflepuffs and the Gryffindors joined them in celebrating the first time in Slytherin hadn't won in seven years. Harry watched the celebrations with a fake smile plastered on his face.

To Harry's thinking, it was just a House Cup. It was nice, but one look at the faces of the Slytherins would tell an outsider all they needed to know about how these houses got along. Plus, no matter how disliked the Slytherins were, they did not deserve to have their broken streak rubbed in their faces like this. Malfoy looked more horrified than if a loved one had dropped dead right in front of him. They all knew this was coming... but still, to have everyone else so happy that they'd lost- no good would come of this.

Gently, Harry got up and began slipping past his peers, making his way over to the Slytherin table, specifically where the first years sat. Only once Harry sat down, did anyone else there take note of him and the looks of hostility confirmed everything Harry had thought about house relations. "Are you guys all right?" Harry asked concerned.

A few looks of hostility were replaced by confusion and curiosity. "What could be wrong, Potter? The rest of the school is celebrating the downfall of "evil" Slytherin? It's not like we matter!" Malfoy replied snidely.

"Yeah I know, they've all lost their minds," Harry replied bitterly. The Slytherins stared at him. "What, do you think it might be possible that a non-Slytherin could be as disgusted by this as you are? What do we really get out of this? Our colors plastered all over the Hall and bragging rights for the ride home and over the summer. How are we treating it? Like these flimsy privileges are of the same caliber as defeating a Dark Lord or something? It's rather disgusting and

disheartening, to see my fellow 'Claws and Gryff' and 'Puff hangers-on acting like this."

The Slytherins around him stared at him like they'd never seen him before. "It's just that they're so happy we didn't win!" Millicent Bulstrode admitted disgustedly.

"Why do you think the other houses relish beating yours?" Harry asked quietly.

Again silence and shock, something Harry was becoming used to causing in people. "Because we're slimy snakes?" Blaise Zabini posited.

"Probably not," Harry answered. "I hate to turn this conversation heavy, or heavier, but if you look over at the Hufflepuff table, you will see Hannah Abbot hugging Susan Bones and Neville Longbottom in celebration," Harry said gesturing to the Hufflepuff table. "All three lost relatives in the last war." More silence. "Voldemort hailed from Slytherin." Harry would probably have needed a very fine blade to cut through the palpable silence his companions emanated. "A pall still hangs over your house because of what happened. Anytime someone sees a Slytherin win, and Snape did not help this, they see Voldemort win, or rather a shade of him win."

"That's- that's ridiculous!" Bulstrode was the first to break silence. "Just because former Slytherins-"

"When people like Draco here," he gestured to Malfoy, "Spew the old blood purity drivel, it definitely picks at old wounds," Harry interrupted.

"I don't know what you're trying to pull here, Potter but-"

"Draco, I don't really know either. All I know is that there's something rotten in Hogwarts, and I'm trying to get to the root of the problem," Harry explained.

"But we are superior to those mudbloods!" Draco declared.

"How do you know that? What does that even mean? If your meaning was that you know a lot more about the Wizarding World than those entering into it for the first time, then yes. Possibly

because the Wizarding World is completely new to muggleborns, whereas purebloods and many halfbloods have had eleven years to get used to it. So in that case, the question is: do you want to stay superior, or do you want the muggleborns to actually know about the Wizarding World? On the other hand, some muggleborns are much more gifted with magic than purebloods, and some halfbloods are more gifted than muggleborns, and some purebloods are more gifted than both. So I don't know how you, or any other pureblood, can claim to be superior," Harry finished.

He turned to the rest of the Slytherins. "I guess the point I'm trying to make here is that the other houses have been taught to be wary of Slytherins because of what happened during the last war, and the blood purity spiel, especially when you have no evidence to back things up, and a lot of evidence to the contrary, definitely isn't helping. Still, for what it's worth, I'm sorry for what you guys have to go through because of those old wounds," Harry said as he stood up and began walking back to his own table. Again, he missed the looks Slytherin students were giving his retreating form.

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